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HIGH SCHOOL FLEXIBILITY ENHANCEMENT PILOT PROJECT

High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project

2010/2011 School Year Year-End Report (Year 1 of Pilot Project Phase)

Submitted by

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High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project

2010/2011 School Year

Year-End Report

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High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project 2010/2011 School Year Year-End Report

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"When learning becomes the priority it transforms everything."

-Participating Principal

Executive Summary

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is in its second year of a three year Pilot Project Phase. At the conclusion of this Pilot Project Phase, recommendations will be made to the Deputy Minister and his executive team for a decision about the future of the current requirement that requires students to have access to 25 hours of instruction for every credit.

This Executive Summary is structured under four major questions:

- What is the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project?
- What is happening in participating school communities as a result of their work within the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project?
- What process did schools use to arrive at the decisions they have made to date in the project?
- What are the results to date of the work of schools within the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project?

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is, at its core, a study about the influence the Carnegie Unit has had on the culture of teaching and learning in Alberta high schools.

What is the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project?

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is a project which involves 16 high school communities from across the province¹ that have been given the opportunity to explore changes in organization and delivery given the removal of the 25-hour per credit requirement (Alberta's adaptation of the Carnegie Unit). The purpose of the four-year High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is to determine if the requirement that students have access to 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit should be maintained.

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is fundamentally a study about the influence that the Carnegie Unit has had on the culture of teaching and learning in Alberta high schools. As the project has concluded its first year of the Pilot Project Phase, the discourse among participants indicates that the Carnegie Unit has had a significant role to play in the conception that the work of the high school is teaching-centric rather than learning-centric.

¹ Appendix A of this report provides a listing of participating schools.



What is happening in participating school communities?

Due to the on-going review of the current literature in educational reform and, more importantly, as a result of the collaborative conversations that are emerging among participants, three major shifts are taking place in most participating schools.² First, virtually all schools have fundamentally shifted the **structure** of their school day. These structural shifts have occurred as a response to the removal of the standardized approach to school timetabling that the Carnegie Unit has demanded. A driving force behind many of the decisions of schools to change their daily use of time has been the recognition that students learn at different paces and that different outcomes require differing amounts of time to master in general.

The structural shifts at participating schools have led to significant shifts in the way schools imagine the roles of students, teachers, parents and administration. This re-thinking of roles has led to a shift in the **culture** of many of the participating schools. A key element in the shifting of culture is the emergence of a realization in participating school communities that their past practices have cast teachers in the role of controllers of the learning environment and, as a result, students have been cast in the role of compliant workers. Questions about the nature of learning and the opportunity to explore new structures has led some schools to shift their thinking so that the work of their schools begins with considering the individual needs of each student first and then casting the teacher in the role of a responsive, caring adult who is there to support learning.

As participating school communities create new cultures of learning it is becoming apparent that old practices are inconsistent with these new cultures.

Finally, the shift in culture of the school has led to a deep, and at times uncomfortable, exploration of **pedagogy** and instructional practice. As participating school communities create new cultures of learning it is becoming apparent that old practices are inconsistent with these new cultures. This has opened the door to a broad inquiry of pedagogy that is leading to student-centered approaches focused on engagement versus teacher-centered approaches focused only on achievement.

The three shifts described above have led participating school communities to implement changes over the 2010/2011 school year. Participating schools have implemented strategies that are responses to input from stakeholders and designed to meet the needs of their community. Although no two schools are implementing the same strategies there are commonalities in the changes that are being made. These changes include:

- The insertion of flex time into the experience of students and teachers. Flex time is time for students to direct their learning choices and receive assistance and instruction in areas of self-identified need.

² Appendix D of this report provides a summary of progress at each of the 16 participating schools

- The addition of a Teacher Advisory role that is designed to focus on relationship building among key stakeholders in students' learning.
- The exploration of Credit Recovery approaches that provide additional time to individual students who may have not been successful in meeting course outcomes within the boundaries of school-scheduled time.
- The development of interdisciplinary approaches to program delivery and design to bring meaning and relevance to students' learning.
- The emergence of collaborative teaching approaches to provide support for teachers and to increase the resources that are available to students as they progress through courses.
- The practice of teacher-managed scheduling to allow groups of teachers to manage time allotted for learning rather than the school managing the time.

What decision making process did schools use?

Understanding the processes used in participating schools is a critically important learning for the potential future transformation of the education system in Alberta. Observations made of engagement processes in participating schools have validated much of what research in effective school leadership suggests. First and foremost, the path of transformation and the ability for a school to maintain its focus in a milieu of change is highly dependent on the skills, attitudes and approaches of the principal.

Principals in the project have provided guidance to their communities by:

- Articulating a clear vision of the future state of their learning communities.
- Extending a great deal of effort to engage stakeholders in the community in a collaborative dialogue about the preferred future for their school.
- Assembling planning teams of teachers to conduct research, collect and analyze data and advise the principal about issues of climate in the school.
- Making wise use of the *Tell Them From Me* survey to collect student voice and create an environment that engages students meaningfully in the redesign of their learning community.
- Using various surveys and theme meetings in addition to the on-going work of School Councils to engage parents meaningfully in the process of redesign.

What are the results?

A full discussion of a suite of 18 measures collected over the life of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is presented in Appendix C. Highlights of trends apparent in the measures collected to date in the project include:

- Positive trends in High School Completion, Drop-Out Rates, Diploma Exam Participation, Student Migration, Course Completion and Intellectual Engagement.
- Positive trends in parents' and teachers' perception of school improvement.

First and foremost, the path of transformation and the ability for a school to maintain its focus in a milieu of change is highly dependent on the skills, attitudes and approaches of the principal.

Anecdotal evidence based on interviews with all participating principals and planning teams indicate the following significant shifts in culture at participating schools.

Principals and planning teams are observing that there is a marked **increase** in:

- Teacher collaboration;
- Teacher conversations about pedagogy and practice;
- Dialogue about the personalization of learning and the need to individualize approaches to support learning;
- Teachers being more flexible and open to considering various options for students to succeed;
- Students taking ownership for their learning;
- Alignment of staff around the vision for the school;
- Generation of ideas among staff to try new approaches;
- The realization that current practices of an emphasis on summative assessment is not aligned with a culture of personalization that is emerging in schools;
- A nurturing, caring and learning-focused relationship between students and teachers.

Principals and planning teams are observing that there is a marked **decrease** in:

- Student discipline issues;
- Teacher-centric approaches to instruction;
- Negative attitude to change among stakeholders;
- The 'frenzy' and stress that often typifies a high school environment.

The discussion of trends presented in Appendix C aims to interpret trends in measures within the context of cultural shifts outlined above.

"The flexibility of our timetable to allow collaboration, seminar time, and flexibility time for student individual work would not be possible in our old timetable. It would be virtually impossible to go back to the 4- block and short noon hour at our school without a clear backlash by all of the school community as the ability of students for personalized learning as well as improved teacher pedagogy are evident since we have been part of the flex."

- Participating Principal

Project Overview

Purpose

The purpose of the four-year High School Flexibility Enhancement Project³ is to determine if the requirement for students to have access to 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit should be maintained. Participating high schools have the opportunity to organize their schools leading to the potential for significant redesign and innovation.

Goals

The goals of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project are:

1. To explore the implications of high school organization and programming free of the 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per credit requirement.
2. To positively impact student achievement and engagement and student, parent and teacher satisfaction in participating schools through the exploration of alternative organizational and delivery structures.
3. To recommend the elimination or maintenance of the requirement for 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per credit.
4. To develop an accountability model that will include school organization, instructional delivery of the *Programs of Study* and achievement of learner outcomes (if applicable).

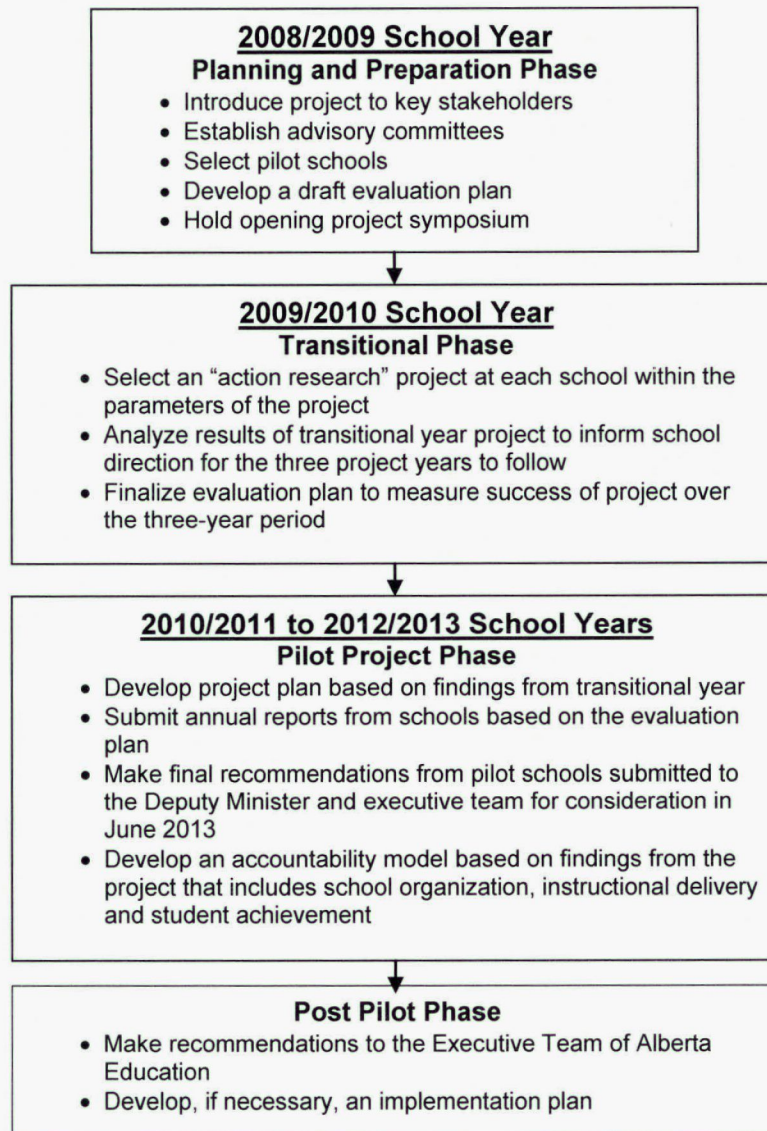
Two critical elements that must be maintained within this project are:

- Changes made to program organization and delivery must be done to enhance student engagement and achievement; and
- Schools must plan a comprehensive approach to engage their stakeholders (students, teachers, parents and the community at large).

³ Appendix B provides the governance structure for this project

Project Phases

The chart below provides an overview for the stages for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project:



The 2010/2011 school year marked the beginning of the “Pilot Project Phase” of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. Participating schools have moved to a full implementation of strategies and approaches explored over the 2009/2010 transitional year. It must be noted that each participating school has taken a unique approach to redesign of programs and delivery alternatives based on a number of factors including:

1. Input from key stakeholders over the planning and transitional year of the project;
2. Developing visions based on the engagement process with key stakeholders in each school community;
3. Readiness of the community to embrace change in the practices and processes at each school;
4. The degree of professional development support available at each school;
5. Alignment of vision emerging from the removal of the 25-hour requirement (the Carnegie Unit) with existing projects and focal points that predated the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project.

The Carnegie Unit

Established in 1906, the Carnegie Unit is a time-based “input” measure for educational attainment. Its original purpose in establishing the foundation of secondary education in North America was to measure relative faculty workloads, determine the cost of instruction per student hour and assist colleges to evaluate students from different school systems. In addition it assisted teachers, administrators, and school boards in their efforts to monitor educational resource inputs and results. In Alberta, the Carnegie Unit has been adapted such that 25 hours of face-to-face instruction is required per high school credit.

The Carnegie Unit, or the 25-hour requirement, continues to serve the purpose for which it was originally intended. The 25 hour requirement provides a consistent, standardized approach for measuring educational inputs by ensuring that students have a standardized amount of time to learn.

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is, at its core, a study about the influence that the Carnegie Unit has had on the culture of teaching and learning in Alberta high schools. Given that the Carnegie Unit focuses on the nature of the teacher inputs into the learning process, dialogue among participating schools in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project suggests that the Carnegie Unit’s notion of school organization has created teaching-centric rather than learning-centric institutions. That is, the focus of the work of schools has been more on what it is that teachers do than what it is that students do in school.

Initial discussions among participants in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project questioned the logic of judging the effectiveness of a high school using a standardized approach to measuring inputs. A consensus began to grow that, although

...the focus of the work of schools has been more on what it is that teachers do than what it is that students do in school.

Rather than seeing the work of the school as standardizing teaching approaches, participants began to envision the work of their school from the perspective of individual students.

intended as an organizational construct designed to manage teaching inputs, the Carnegie Unit's logic may have crept into teacher's beliefs about the nature of learning. That is, that student learning is supported simply by focusing on the work of the teacher. Once it became apparent that the Carnegie Unit has potentially determined the way high schools think about learning, an exploration about alternative ways of thinking about learning in schools emerged.

Conversations amongst participants in the project coupled with their review of a broad range of educational literature created a way of thinking about the work of participating schools that was inconsistent with the teacher-centric logic of the Carnegie Unit. Rather than seeing the work of the school as standardizing teaching approaches, participants began to envision the work of their schools from the perspective of individual students. It was recognized that no matter how consistent and standardized an approach might be to the design of inputs, students responded to these inputs in very individualized ways. As this realization began to mature within the participating school communities, discussions about the individualization of learning, the personalization of learning and the importance of embedding learning in a productive relationship became key themes.

"Despite the wealth of new programs falling under the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the commonality is personalization. Whether it is our Teacher Advisor Program, personalized timetables or flex time, students come first. Many of our reforms have centered on giving students a voice in their education..."
- Participating Principal

...a more personalized notion of student engagement took on a higher profile among participating schools as a desired outcome of student learning.

A related theme that grew amongst the school participants centered on an exploration of what we deem to be desired educational "outputs" from students. While the standard view of achievement as the attainment of high grades is seen as playing an important role, a line of inquiry opened around the idea of engagement. While grades were seen as a natural measure of learning within the logic of standardized inputs offered up by the Carnegie Unit, a more personalized notion of student engagement took on a higher profile among participating schools as a desired outcome of student learning.

The shift of the educational discourse from teaching-centric to learning-centric institutions is proving to be a transformational shift in thinking for participating schools. It has opened dialogue among teachers, administrators, parents and students that has caused some participating schools to re-think stakeholder roles in the educational endeavours of the school. It has helped some of the schools redefine their purpose and begin the process of fundamentally changing their work.

"The Carnegie Unit created practices and traditions in schools that over time have built up a way of thinking. It has created a template and pattern for schools to follow. By removing the restriction, schools have been encouraged to think about what they want, could, and should be doing. The Hex Project has validated that we have permission to use our professional judgment and expertise to personalize our schools to become places that reflect our students' needs."

- Participating Principal

A key success of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project has been the collaboration between schools...

Setting the Context for Transformation: Nature of Conversations

A key success of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project has been the collaboration between schools as well as the collaboration between schools and Alberta Education. Participants in the project engage in full group meetings on a regular basis throughout the year and the Project Manager meets with staff at each school at least twice per year. These opportunities to share experiences, opportunities and challenges related to school redesign have led to a variety of conversations that have coalesced into three major themes: **shifts in structure**; **shifts in culture**; and, **shifts in pedagogical practice**. These themes are interrelated and appear to have evolved from the planning year to present time. Conversations around these themes have led to deeper levels of inquiry among school communities, and decisions about new implementation strategies have arisen from the inquiry.

"As for the impact of other participating schools there is nothing directly to point to as a specific source for our methods or agenda for change. But the power of alliance of similarly minded participants who reference a common world of educational thought is not to be underestimated. There can be no private language and the common voice we have is made infinitely stronger. The gatherings, meetings, collaborations, etc. are the lifeblood for energizing and expanding the work we do."

- Participating Principal

By the end of the 2010/2011 school year virtually all schools have made significant changes to the way time is used in their schools.

Each theme is briefly outlined below along with questions and lines of inquiry that have emerged among the 16 participating schools.

Shifts in Structure

The stated purpose of the project, an exploration of the 25-hour requirement, initially led most participants in the project to consider making changes to their timetables and bell schedules. A small number of schools implemented structural changes to their bell schedules in the 2009/2010 transitional year. By the end of the 2010/2011 school year, virtually all schools have made significant changes to the way time is used in their schools.

Conversations about the shifts in structures have centered on the following questions:

- How much time do students need to master the outcomes of individual courses?
- How can flexibility be built into a timetable to accommodate the various paces of student learning?
- To what degree must the school control the time available for learning and to what degree can the responsibility for the use of time be handed to the students?
- How can time be made available to students so that they can pursue personal interest and seek assistance where needed?
- How can time be managed in the school to reduce the degree of stress on students and teachers in the school?
- How can time be built into the day to accommodate teacher collaborative planning?

"We are creating a schedule with larger chunks of time and given teams of staff the opportunity to schedule activities and use time as they decide. Most teams have flexible schedules that change week-to-week. Generally they use their time to have content blocks that relate to specific outcomes and project blocks where students engage in activities that allow for practice and synthesis of curricular outcomes."

- Participating Principal

School was shifting from a school-centered or teacher-centered place to a student-centered place.

Shifts in Culture

As schools explored alternative uses of time it became evident that changing the way time was made available to students and teachers brought about a need to re-think the roles of students, teachers and parents in the on-going work of the school. The questions raised as schools investigated changes to the structural elements of their work led most school communities to the realization that their school was shifting from a school-centered or teacher-centered place to a student-centered place. This shift opened the door to conversations about inclusiveness and meeting the needs of all students. These cultural shifts did not become immediately evident in all project schools but as the project has evolved conversations turned to this reality and soon became a central theme in the inquiry among the 16 participating schools.

Conversations about shifts in culture have centered on the following questions:

- How can teachers relinquish some of the control over time and pacing but still adhere to their responsibilities to support student learning?
- What is the role of the school in helping students develop the responsibility to manage their learning?
- What is the nature of the relationship between students, teachers, counselors and administrators if students have been given the opportunity to guide their learning in meaningful ways?

- How do school practices such as streaming conflict with the ability of the school to honour the learning goals of students?
- What does success mean in school if all students are not following a standardized path through their coursework?
- Is it possible for teachers to work in isolation given the shift in emphasis from teacher-controlled approaches to student-directed approaches?
- How can content outcomes be delivered so that they are continuously available to all students?
- How can parents become more meaningfully engaged in the process of learning to help guide their children towards learning goals?

“...the pacing and efficiency of combination courses, the relationships built in combination courses, and the hopeful, persistent culture of assessment all have contributed to students feeling capable, connected and hopeful in their learning.”
 - Participating Principal

Shifts in Pedagogical Practice

The structural changes led some schools to intentionally define the behaviours of students differently based on the changing structures as a day or week progressed. For example, schools that incorporated flex time into their schedule needed to define roles of students and teachers differently at this time than at times when a group of students and teachers were scheduled by the school to be together. As the project evolves professional staff at participating schools are working collaboratively to shift pedagogical practice based on both the shifts in structure and shifts in culture that are continuously unfolding.

As the project evolves professional staff at participating schools are working collaboratively to shift pedagogical practice based on both the shifts in structure and shifts in culture that are continuously unfolding.

Conversations about shifts in culture have centered on the following questions:

- How can program outcomes be presented to motivate interest and more deeply engage students?
- What advantages can be brought to learning through a consideration of interdisciplinary approaches to outcomes?
- How can the school more efficiently meet the needs of all its students through collaborative teaching models?
- What role does technology play in engaging students more deeply and allowing them to develop networks of learning?
- How can assessment become more pedagogically focused?
- How can program outcomes be managed so that students are given the ability to pursue interest and lines of inquiry related to the disciplines being studied?

"My role as a teacher has shifted from that of a lecturer and deliverer of information to that of a facilitator. Students are expected to become more independent and take their learning into their own hands. This has allowed me the opportunity to focus more on helping individual students as opposed to seeing students as one single entity with a specific method of learning."

- Participating Teacher

One could argue that without the opportunity to fundamentally change the use of time through a structural change these schools may never have arrived at the deeper questions around culture and pedagogy.

The three shifts outlined above along with the related questions have led to a robust professional dialogue among participating schools. Based on the evolution of these three themes among the participating schools it would seem that the structural changes that were made early in the project became the catalyst for conversations around culture and pedagogy. One could argue that without the opportunity to fundamentally change the use of time through a structural change, these schools may never have arrived at the deeper questions around culture and pedagogy.

The importance of having the opportunity to explore structural change was a point of unanimous agreement among participating school leaders. However, the conversations with principals and planning team members at the schools indicate that the power of these structural changes was not simply in providing an alternative to the use of time. Rather, the power of making structural changes is seen to lie in the critical conversations that have emerged over culture, pedagogy and the purpose of the work of schools.

"...what is interesting is that the removal of the time restrictions facilitated implementation of best practice in all realms of education. Teachers were a) more at ease with the idea of change, b) focused on what is in the best interest of the student, c) engaged in meaningful conversations and collaboration with other staff members, and d) looked at the curriculum first – not time requirements. When learning becomes a priority, it transforms everything."

- Participating Principal

Changes Implemented

Although High School Redesign is a common theme in the current educational literature, it was not the intent of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project to have participating schools replicate any existing model. Rather, school principals were exposed to the literature and were encouraged to engage stakeholders of their communities in a meaningful dialogue around change and were given the opportunity to redesign their communities based on community input and professional learning. The end result is 16 different approaches to redesign among 16 schools across the province.

There are, however, some commonalities among participating schools in the changes that have been instituted thus far. Through collaborative conversations that have taken place, schools have shared experiences, successes and challenges. These conversations have led to the following common practices which are interpreted slightly differently in the schools that have adopted these practices.

Flex Time

The idea of flex time is relatively simple. Traditional scheduling practices send students to meet as a group with a teacher for a specific area of study. Many schools in the project have created a block of time during the scheduled day where students are not sent to any specific teacher for any specific course but instead students have the opportunity to make a choice of what, where and with whom they will learn. In short, during a flex time all students are able to make a choice and all teachers are available to support the choices being made.

...flex time has introduced the concept of student direction into the culture of these schools and has left school communities to explore ways to support student choice in a manner that keeps the process of learning moving forward.

The reason that flex time is being considered by schools is two-fold. First, it is an attempt to hand over some control of learning to the student so that they might have the opportunity to use time with teachers in a manner that best suits their individual emerging needs. The second reason for its implementation is to allow students choice to pursue areas of interest that may not be available to them in regularly scheduled time. Regardless of the reason, flex time has introduced the concept of student direction into the culture of these schools and has left school communities to explore ways to support student choice in a manner that keeps the process of learning moving forward.

Flex time is an excellent example of a structural shift that has led to both a cultural and pedagogical shift in school communities. Handing over the control of time and resources to students has shifted schools towards a culture of student-centeredness and presented challenges for the community in re-thinking the purpose of time in school and the role of students and teachers. Also, the tension between student and teacher direction has led to some deep reflection about the culture of schooling.

"The Flex Block may be considered a vehicle to implement innovative teaching practices/ delivery and act as a catalyst for development of additional teaching methodologies. The goal is to develop innovative practices in order to meet needs of students as identified by students, parents and educators..."
- Participating Principal

"With flex time I felt like I could have time to ask teachers for help with difficult concepts and also that it increased my interest in subjects and involvement in my school..."
- Participating Student

Teacher Advisory

One of the common themes that emerge from both the literature in effective secondary schooling and the input from students in surveys and focus groups is the importance of positive and purposeful relationships in school. Voices of students in many of the participating schools have suggested that traditional structures in high schools and traditional teaching practices have not necessarily focused on the importance of establishing relationships. In fact, survey results from students have told schools that some students feel there is not an adult in the building who knows them well or necessarily cares about them. In addition, students have communicated that they live in school cultures where students are not given meaningful opportunities to be collaborative in their learning. Nor are students given opportunities to learn about or work with others in their school.

Over time the relationship between the teacher advisor and his or her students becomes focused solely on the personalized needs of the student.

A response to this input has been the establishment of teacher advisory in some of the participating schools. The teacher advisory is supported by an organizational structure where all professional staff in a school is assigned a group of students to work with over the students' life at the school. The role of the advisor is one of facilitator, advocate and guide and clearly not "deliverer" of any particular curricular outcomes. Over time, the relationship between the teacher advisor and his or her students becomes focused solely on the personalized needs of the student. The advisor becomes the primary source of support for the student in meeting learning goals.

As advisory programs have been evolving in schools they have grown to provide additional benefits such as:

- More meaningful relationships between the school and parent through advisory;
- The establishment of portfolios of student learning monitored and supported by advisors;
- A change in parent-teacher interview approaches that focus on general learning conferences between students, parents and teacher advisors;
- Consistent and personalized learning plans that ultimately lead to graduation.

"All of our Teacher Advisors participated in Student Learning Conferences this year. Our Teacher Advisors state that discussing the 'whole student' rather than just a grade, is a more rewarding experience."

- Participating Principal

Credit Recovery

Traditionally, if a student has not met the outcomes of a course of study within a limit of time allotted, then the student would receive a failing grade and would be expected to re-take the course for credit. Practices are emerging in project schools which question this traditional approach. Instead of automatically assigning a failing grade to students who do not successfully complete all required outcomes, some participating schools are

looking at each individual case to determine the extent of the learning gaps that exist in a student's understanding of course outcomes and then determining the next best course of action. In some cases, this course of action is to provide some additional time and alternative resources to a student to address deficiencies and assign a final grade when the student has mastered the outcomes at a proficient level.

The practice of credit recovery has uncovered interesting questions for participating schools. What does it mean to fail? Does it support continuous learning to assign a failing grade to a student? What does it mean to master outcomes at a proficient level? How can schools be structured so that mastery of outcomes becomes the common goal rather than assigning a final grade within a specified period of time? Can schools support students who master outcomes in less time than is traditionally assigned through the timetable? These questions are causing schools to further examine their structures, cultures and pedagogies leading to deeper transformations of their school communities.

"I enjoyed taking the course this way because then I could get as much help as I wanted and it was a lot more convenient. The course didn't seem so stressful and overwhelming than if I would have redone the whole course. I enjoyed being able to redo my quizzes/ exams if I didn't do well the first time. I would be able to go through it as many times as I needed to in order to understand the information."

- Participating Student

In an attempt to bring coherence to student learning experiences some participating schools are exploring interdisciplinary approaches to coursework.

Interdisciplinary Approaches

Another theme that emerges from the voice of students deals with the meaning and relevance of coursework for students. In short, especially in content-heavy areas of study, students are questioning the relevance of their work in school. In an attempt to bring coherence to student learning experiences some participating schools are exploring interdisciplinary approaches to coursework. This process has ranged from teams of teachers informally gathering to explore overlaps and synergies between their outcomes to formal approaches by entire staffs to deconstruct Programs of Study and reconstruct them in ways that are more meaningful for students.

An adjunct to the question for meaningful learning for students has been the foray of some schools into the community at large for students to engage in meaningful learning activities. This has led to the pursuit of career-related interest for some students as they design projects of personal interest for special project credit. It has also led to the pursuit of agreements with post-secondary institutions to explore the possibility of dual-credit opportunities for students.

"...we attempted to create a curriculum that was rigorous and relevant for our students by re-packaging the traditional course-by-course approach into something that was more life-based ..."

- Participating Principal

Collaborative Teaching Approaches

Past practice in high schools has, for the most part, given the locus of control to individual teachers to manage the outcomes for a specific course. The end result of this approach has been to hand individual teachers a wide range of responsibilities to manage the progress of groups of students. Sometimes conditions exist such that the groups that individual teachers are left to manage are overly large and diverse.

As some project schools are examining the various contexts and modalities of learning there has been a movement towards increased collaboration in the creation of learning environments. Collaborative approaches bring additional perspectives and resources to groups of students while providing additional supports for the teachers involved in the partnerships. The approaches have ranged from informal planning partnerships to formal team teaching arrangements.

As some project schools are examining the various contexts and modalities of learning there has been a movement towards looking at collaborative approaches to creating learning environments.

"Teachers researched the idea of interdisciplinary and project-based learning then presented to their colleagues at staff meetings. Three teachers participated in the project collaborative meetings. A key teacher has taken the lead in interdisciplinary project-based teaching and learning. She is organizing and helping her colleagues with their projects."

- Participating Principal

"Localized" Timetabling

As some teachers are exploring interdisciplinary studies and collaborative teaching, it has become apparent that access to large blocks of time is necessary to support these approaches. As a result, some schools are handing over large blocks of time to groups of teachers to manage on a day-to-day basis so that teachers may be responsive to the emerging needs of the students. This practice is allowing groups of teachers to collaborate and use their professional judgment to determine the best use of time rather than having the school dictate the amount of time to be used to deliver outcomes from individual courses of study.

"I enjoyed building a rapport with the students over a two-block time period each day. This rapport allowed me to know them on a deeper level and be more involved with their daily habits... I often heard students saying that they looked forward to the flex class – they seemed to make a deeper connection with each other by seeing each other for a longer time period each day."

- Participating Teacher

Getting to the Decisions: Engaging the Community

The path to change varied as widely as the actual strategies implemented among the 16 participating schools of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. There are, however, some common approaches that have been taken to community engagement that are worthy of review.

In gathering a team of leaders to monitor progress and investigate possibilities, principals have created significant momentum in making fundamental shifts in thinking and practice.

One of the key features to engaging a school community in considering change and implementing alternative strategies is the leadership of the principal. The level of engagement among stakeholders in a school community can be traced back to the ability of the principal to capture the attention and imagination of key stakeholders. As one could imagine 16 different principals offer 16 different approaches and styles to leading a school through redesign. However, the ability of the principal to articulate a vision for the changes and to keep all stakeholders focused on the underlying reasons for any implemented strategy has risen as one of the most important factors in sustaining a path towards transformation. A second key factor is the extent to which the principal distributes the leadership among his or her school. In gathering a team of leaders to monitor progress and investigate possibilities, principals have created significant momentum in making fundamental shifts in thinking and practice.

“Administration at the school has been working towards building capacity for all staff members in the school. The process, however, is not forced. Staff members have been provided with opportunities to research, explore, learn and return to our school as change agents. This ensures that change is much more meaningful and enduring within our school.”

- Participating Principal

Following is a brief synopsis of the various strategies used in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project to engage the community in a deep and meaningful dialogue about transformation.

Planning Teams

Many principals in participating schools have assembled teams of lead teachers and administrators to serve as a planning team over the life of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. The responsibility of the planning team varies from school to school but commonalities in their roles are:

- Reviewing literature and research on topics of interest that emerge from the practice of teachers at the school;
- Conducting surveys and focus groups of students, colleagues, parents and community members to elicit opinions and track trends of acceptance of changes implemented;
- Review and analyze data including student achievement data, opinion surveys and needs assessments;

- Take a lead role in the identification of professional development needs and engage in school-led professional development initiatives;
- Advise the principal of key issues emerging from engagement with teachers and students to ensure that the voice of these key stakeholders is central to the decision-making process.

...responding to what the survey has told principals by making substantive changes in the school has raised the profile of the survey as an instrument to honour and develop student voice.

Tell Them From Me Survey

The *Tell Them From Me* survey is a Canadian normed instrument that can be used to track the growth in student engagement in the school. This survey instrument is comprised of several measures that provide data on students' social engagement, academic or institutional engagement and, intellectual engagement on an annual basis. The survey has been implemented twice a year for each year of the project since the 2009/2010 transitional year.

The *Tell Them From Me* survey is more than an instrument to measure student engagement. By sharing results from the survey with teachers, students and parents, some schools in the project have used the survey very strategically to develop a process of engagement of key stakeholders in their communities. In addition, sharing results with students and responding to what the survey has told principals by making substantive changes in the school has raised the profile of the survey as an instrument to honour and develop student voice.

Parent Engagement

Some participating schools have been very intentional in reaching out to the parent community to both educate parents about the changes being made at the school and the rationale behind these changes as well as gathering information about the satisfaction of parents as the changes evolve. One strategy that has been used in some of the schools is the implementation of locally developed surveys that seek parent input on specific strategies implemented at the school. In addition to surveying parents some participating schools have held "Orientation Evenings" or "Parent Boot Camps" to introduce parents to some of the structural, cultural and pedagogic shifts that are taking place in the school. Of course, School Councils have been valuable to principals as advisory groups to share perceptions and give input to the process of changes that are occurring at the school.

Principals are reporting that the process of engagement of key stakeholders in the school communities has been an extremely valuable way to generate ideas and identify new lines of inquiry as redesign efforts continually unfold in their schools. The effect of these strategies on the nature of the dialogue among all stakeholders at the schools has been extremely positive.

Principals are reporting that the process of engagement of key stakeholders in the school communities has been an extremely valuable way to generate ideas and identify new lines of inquiry as redesign efforts continually unfold in their schools.

"As many members of our planning team also sit on other committees in the school, they have been able to make the connections between other committee work and goals and our work in redesign and then take those connections back to their departments. The result has been both a greater degree of collaboration between teachers and departments and a stronger sense of professionalism. That teachers are looking more critically at their practice and the impact of their practice on their students may explain our data that indicates that 97% of our teachers believe the quality of education has improved but only 92% are satisfied with the quality of teaching. This suggests that our teachers know they can be better and the desire to improve is there."

- Participating Principal

Results

Participants in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project have adopted a suite of measures to track progress over the life of the project. *Appendix C: Report of Measures After Year 1 of the Pilot Phase* provides a detailed reporting and analysis of the 18 measures that are being collected.

Trends apparent in the measures collected to date in the project include:

- Positive trends in High School Completion, Drop-Out Rates, Diploma Exam Participation, Student Migration, Course Completion and Intellectual Engagement.
- Positive trends in parents' and teachers' perception of school improvement.

The analysis of these trends provides some lessons about the nature of engagement of stakeholders in an environment of transformational change. A complete discussion of the analysis of the measures and the trends highlighted above is provided in Appendix C.

It is important that the measures collected are considered within the context of the shifts in structure, culture and pedagogical practice that are occurring among participating schools in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project.

The nature of the shifts in culture and pedagogy are very apparent in the conversations that the project manager has been conducting over the life of the project with participating principals and planning teams. In the fall of 2011 an interview with principals and planning teams was conducted at each of the participating schools. During this interview principals and their teams were invited respond to the following questions:

1. Has your school fundamentally changed since the 2008/09 school year?
(1 (not at all) - 10 (well on the path of transformation))
2. What is there more of and what is there less of in your school due to the change?

3. To what degree is being a part of the project responsible for creating the changes?

Responses to the first question averaged 7.5 giving anecdotal evidence that school leaders among participating schools believe that their communities have significantly changed since the beginning of the project. Discussion that ensued from this first question indicated that most of the initial change was attributed to structural changes that had been made at the schools (i.e. changes in timetables and bell schedules) but that as the project evolved changes were more evident in the culture of the school. Discussion also indicated the nature of the cultural changes was evident in the attitude of teachers towards students' learning and the centrality of considering individual student need in the planning and delivery of program. This cultural shift has now led to a realization among professionals that the focus must be on shifting pedagogical practices which are commensurate with the shift towards a student-centered approach to the work of the school.

Some strong themes emerged from responses to the second question. These themes point clearly to the shift in culture that is taking place in the 16 participating schools.

Responses to the second question are summarized below.

Principals and planning teams are observing that there is a marked **increase** in:

- Teacher collaboration;
- Teacher conversations about pedagogy and practice;
- Dialogue about the personalization of learning and the need to individualize approaches to support learning;
- Teachers being more flexible and open to considering various options for students to succeed;
- Students taking ownership for their learning;
- Alignment of staff around the vision for the school;
- Generation of ideas among staff to try new approaches;
- The realization that current practices of an emphasis on summative assessment is not aligned with a culture of personalization that is emerging in schools;
- A nurturing, caring and learning focused relationship between students and teachers.

Principals and planning teams are observing that there is a marked **decrease** in:

- Student discipline issues;
- Teacher-centric approaches to instruction;
- Negative attitude to change among stakeholders;
- The 'frenzy' and stress that often typifies a high school environment.

When asked the third question responses became very measured and reflective. There was consensus that participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project was a key factor in the changes that principals and planning teams have observed. The impact that participation in the project has had was in creating a catalyst for discussion among stakeholders.

...being involved in the project gave their professional communities a critical sense of permission to explore, take risks and exercise their professional judgment to better meet the needs of their students.

A second theme that emerged from responses to the third question was that being a part of the project created an environment of responsibility and professional accountability to both Alberta Education and, more importantly, to each other to fully explore the impact of the Carnegie Unit on high school practice. The changes that are currently happening in participating schools are addressing issues far beyond the structural changes in timetables. Principals and planning teams suggested that while making these structural changes has been critical in creating the circumstances for further exploration of the impact of the Carnegie Unit, some of the current shifts in culture and pedagogy could have occurred without the project. It remained a question in the minds of those interviewed whether the shifts in culture and pedagogy would ever have occurred had the school not been a part of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. However, it was a consistent theme that being involved in the project gave their professional communities a critical sense of permission to explore, take risks and exercise their professional judgment to better meet the needs of their students.

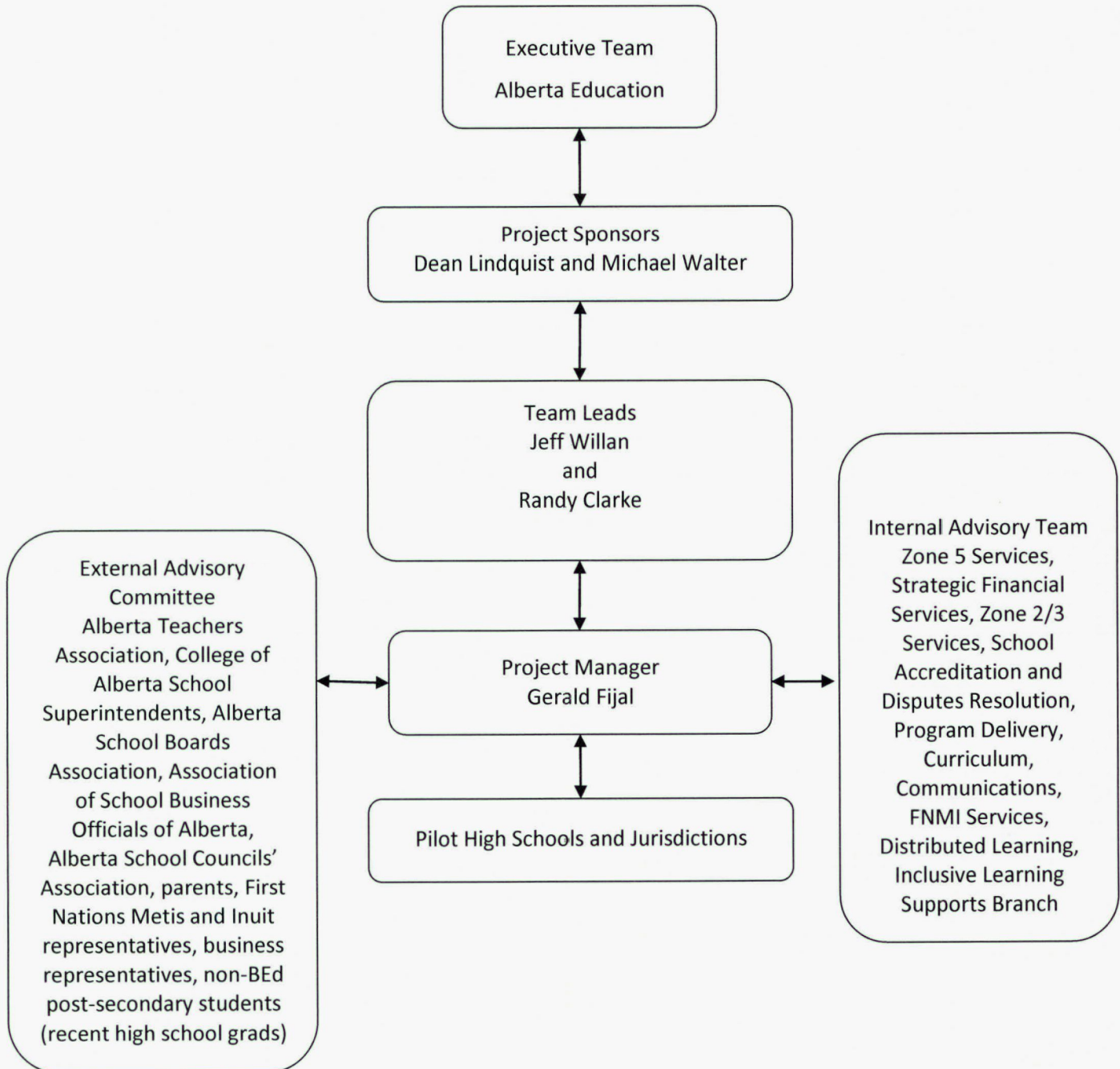
"I have never done as much educational reading and reflection on teaching practice as I have in the past year and a half, probably since university! Having 25 years of teaching experience, however, has made this reflection and analysis much more meaningful – more so than anything I did while attending university and only student teaching."

- Participating Teacher

Appendix A: Participating Schools and Jurisdictions

School	Jurisdiction
Grande Prairie Composite	Grande Prairie School District #2357
Bellerose Composite	St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6
Olds High School	Chinook's Edge School Division #73
JC Charyk School	Prairie Land Regional Division #25
Bishop McNally High School	Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District #1
Holy Trinity Academy	Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division #3
Catholic Central High School	Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division #4
M.E. Lazerte High School	Edmonton School District #7
Spruce Grove Composite	Parkland School Division #70
William E Hay Composite	Clearview School Division #71
Peace Wapiti Academy	Peace Wapiti School Division #76
Edwin Parr Composite	Aspen View Schools Regional Division #19
St. Mary of the Lake Catholic School	Living Waters Catholic Schools Regional Division #42
James Fowler High School	Calgary School District #19
Ecole St. Marguerite-Bourgeys	Conseil Scolaire Catholique et Francophone du Sud de l'Alberta #4
Archbishop O'Leary Catholic High School	Edmonton Catholic Separate School District #7

Appendix B: Governance Structure



Appendix C: Report of Measures after Year 1 of the Pilot Phase

Following is a report of measures collected among the 16 schools participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. This report is presented to provide some evidence of progress for the project. It should be noted that this appendix reports median measures for the group of 16 participating schools. Although this approach allows for the identification of trends among all schools, the success of the project is best understood by examining each individual school separately. However, this report is designed to examine the project as a whole.

Chart 1: Summary of Year 1 Measures below displays the medians of all measures collected at the 16 participating schools. The first six measures are shaded as the collection of these measures lag by a full year compared to the other twelve measures. This chart provides an opportunity to observe trends in measures over time but does not allow the reader to compare among all measures as they are not all collected in the same year (The median of results was selected as the measure of central tendency as two of the schools have very small high school populations and, as a result, many of the measures collected at these schools fluctuate widely from year to year. Using the median as the measure of central tendency helps to mitigate the effect of these fluctuations).

Chart 1: Summary of Year 1 Measures -Medians (All Schools September 2011)

Measure	3 Year Average	Baseline Year	Baseline Measure	Year One Year	Year One Measure
High School Completion (3 year)	75.0%	08/09	76.2%	09/10	75.2%
Drop Out Rate	3.6%	08/09	3.3%	09/10	3.5%
Diploma Exam Participation (4 + Exams)	50.3%	08/09	48.2%	09/10	51.8%
Diploma Exam Acceptable (50% +)	79.7%	08/09	80.9%	09/10	77.9%
Diploma Exam Excellence (80+)	11.8%	08/09	13.8%	09/10	11.8%
Student Migration (% Grade 10 and 11 Loss)	15.7%	08/09	14.5%	09/10	13.8%
Student - Quality of Education	93.0%	09/10	94.0%	10/11	93.5%
Student - Quality of Teaching	88.7%	09/10	90.0%	10/11	88.0%
Parent - Quality of Education	87.5%	09/10	85.0%	10/11	87.0%
Parent - Quality of Teaching	84.3%	09/10	83.0%	10/11	82.0%
Parent - Improvement	22.7%	09/10	22.0%	10/11	26.5%
Parent - Stay the Same	49.3%	09/10	51.0%	10/11	50.5%
Teacher - Quality of Education	96.3%	09/10	97.0%	10/11	97.0%
Teacher – Quality of Teaching	97.3%	09/10	97.5%	10/11	100.0%
Teacher - Improvement	47.7%	09/10	46.0%	10/11	51.5%
Teacher – Stay the Same	36.0%	09/10	34.5%	10/11	28.5%
Course Completion	22.6 courses	09/10	23.5 courses	10/11	24.0 courses
Intellectual Engagement	--	09/10	47.0%	10/11	57.0%

**Note: Measures that are shaded lag by one school year.

The 2009/10 School Year (transitional year of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project), represents the first year that comparisons could be made between all measures, given the lag time in reporting several of the measures. It must be noted that in the transitional year of the project many of the participating schools did not make significant changes to program organization and delivery approaches for their students. However, the majority of the schools did dedicate a significant amount of time and of effort to engaging their school communities in a critical analysis of their practices with a view to making future changes. Therefore, it can be assumed that the results reported in *Chart 2: Summary of Measures collected for the 2009/10 School Year* represents school communities who are immersed in the preliminary stages of significant school redesign. One might suggest that this gives us a glimpse into potential school community responses to the early stages of transformation.

Chart 2: Summary of Measures (Medians) collected for the 2009/2010 School Year (All Schools)

Measure	3 Year Average (including 2009/10)	Measures collected in the 2009/10 School Year
High School Completion (3 year)	75.0%	75.2%
Drop Out Rate	3.6%	3.5%
Diploma Exam Participation (4 + Exams)	50.3%	51.8%
Diploma Exam Acceptable (50% +)	79.7%	77.9%
Diploma Exam Excellence (80+)	11.8%	11.8%
Student Migration (% Grade 10 and 11 Loss)	15.7%	13.8%
Student - Quality of Education	93.0%	94.0%
Student - Quality of Teaching	88.7%	90.0%
Parent - Quality of Education	87.5%	85.0%
Parent - Quality of Teaching	84.3%	83.0%
Parent - Improvement	22.7%	22.0%
Parent - Stay the Same	49.3%	51.0%
Teacher - Quality of Education	96.3%	97.0%
Teacher - Quality of Teaching	97.3%	97.5%
Teacher - Improvement	47.7%	46.0%
Teacher - Stay the Same	36.0%	34.5%
Course Completion	22.6 courses	23.5 courses
Intellectual Engagement	--	47.0%

Description of Measures

*(Measures collected through the 2009/2010 school year)

High School Completion

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. This measure is an indication of those students who completed high school within three years of entering Grade 10. A student is considered to have completed if they meet the requirements for an Alberta High School Diploma, a Certificate of high school achievement or an Alberta High School Equivalency Diploma (GED). Included as completers are: those students who may not have met the requirements above but have entered an Alberta post-secondary program, or have registered in an Alberta apprenticeship program, or have earned credit for five Grade 12 level courses, including four diploma exam courses.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Drop Out Rate

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. This measure is an indication of students who have left the education system without completing high school.

A decline in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Diploma Exam Participation

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. This measure is an indication of the percentage of students who have written four or more diploma examinations within three years of high school.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Diploma Exam Acceptable

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. The measure reports the percentages of students taking the examination who achieve the acceptable standard (i.e. a mark of 50%) as a weighted average taken over all exams written in the school.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Diploma Exam Excellence

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. The measure reports the percentages of students taking the examination who achieve the standard of excellence (i.e. a mark of 80%+) as a weighted average taken over all exams written in the school.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Student Migration

This measure is taken from annual September 30th enrolment statistics collected by Alberta Education. By comparing the registration of students from year-to-year on September 30th we are able to determine if a student migrated in or out of a school. Students are registered as “migrating out” of a school if they drop off a school’s registration in comparison to the previous year and are considered as “migrating in” if they appear on a school’s registration list for the first time in any given year. For a Grade 10–12 school there will be a large migration of students into Grade 10 and is a large migration out of Grade 12 students (mostly to graduation).

In the spirit of creating an inclusive school community focused on the success of each child, school personnel are concerned when students leave their school before they have completed their high school studies. Although there will always be an element of migration out of a school for families that move to other communities, inclusive schools are focused on retaining those students they serve and stemming any movement of students between schools within the same geographic region.

For the purposes of a student migration summary statistic for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the percentage loss of students at the Grade 10 and Grade 11 level is reported as this best represents the students that inclusive schools would be interested in retaining through graduation.

A decline in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Measures collected through 2010/2011 school year.

Student, Parent and Teacher Satisfaction

The charts provide 11 measures of satisfaction gleaned from the Accountability Pillar Survey that is administered annually to all teachers and to Grade 10 students and parents in Alberta schools. The 16 participating schools in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project used surveys with all of their parents and students starting in the 2010/2011 school year. As a result, the results for 2010/2011 represent the satisfaction of ALL students, parents and teachers in these 16 schools whereas the baseline and 3-year average measures for the satisfaction questions represent the satisfaction of only the Grade 10 students and parents.

The questions from the Accountability Pillar Survey that the results are reporting on are as follows:
Student Satisfaction Questions:

- Overall, is the education you are receiving at school (Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Poor, Don't Know)?

- *Is the quality of teaching at your school (Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Poor, Don't Know)?*

Parent/ Teacher Satisfaction Questions:

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you... (Very satisfied, Satisfied, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied, Don't Know)

- *With the quality of education your child is receiving at school?*
- *With the quality of teaching at your child's school?*

An increase in these measures would indicate a positive trend.

Course Completion

This measure comes from data that is collected from schools annually by Alberta Education. When a student completes a course, this information is reported to and stored by Alberta Education. The data includes the course name, number of credits and the assessed grade for each course that a student completes. The measure reported in the charts represents the average number of courses taken by a student in each of the participating schools based on the data that has been collected by Alberta Education on behalf of the school. The credit value of a "course" may range from 1 to 10 credits. For example, all Career and Technology Studies courses are reported as 1-credit modules whereas a Work Experience course could be reported as 10 credits. The measure, as reported, does not factor in the credit value; it simply divides the total courses completed at the school by the September 30th enrolment at the school in the same year providing an overall average number of courses taken by each student each year.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Intellectual Engagement

The Intellectual Engagement measure is taken from the *Tell Them From Me Survey* which is given to students at each of the participating schools twice a year. The measure is a composite measure that is based on the responses of the students to 54 questions drawn from survey measures on Interest and Motivation, Effective Learning Time, Relevance, and Rigor in the subject areas of Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. Students who meet a certain response threshold are considered to be intellectually engaged. The result is measured as a percentage.

The *Tell Them From Me Survey* is widely used across Canada. As a result, a Canadian norm is available for measures collected by this survey. The Canadian norm for Intellectual Engagement Composite for high schools for the 2010/2011 school year was 44%. The Intellectual Engagement Composite for schools participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project for the 2010/2011 school year was 57%.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

Analysis of Measures

A brief analysis of measures collected in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project will be presented in two ways. First, trends over time will be discussed and then a comparison between some measures will be presented. As six of the measures have been collected only through the 2009/2010 school year, the analysis of trends for these will be presented separately.

It is important to consider the trends in the context of the work that is being done in participating schools. As outlined previously in the report, change implementation strategies have predominately occurred in three areas: shifts in structure, shifts in culture and shifts in pedagogical practice. The 2009/2010 transitional year of the project saw few actual shifts in structure, culture or pedagogy in participating schools as the 2009/2010 year was designed to be a year to engage school communities in planning. However, the conversations leading to change in these three areas had certainly begun in the transitional year. The 2010/2011 school year saw the majority of schools implement significant structural changes to their work, spurring deeper reflection and inquiry in issues of culture and pedagogy.

Trends in measures collected

Chart 3: Indication of Trends in Six Measures collected through the 2009/2010 School Year summarizes the trends in the first six measures. The chart below displays the number of schools showing a positive trend in the measure compared to the number of schools showing a negative trend. The median positive and negative changes are also indicated to provide information about the strength of the overall trend in each measure. The changes reported are differences between the measures collected in the 2009/2010 school year **compared to the 3-year average of this same measure at each school.**

Chart 3: Indication of Trends in Six Measures collected up to the 2009/2010 School Year

Measure	Number of schools with a positive trend	Number of schools with a negative trend	Median positive change	Median negative change	Overall Trend
High School Completion	11	5	3.6%	2.4%	Positive
Drop-Out Rate	11	5	1.0%	1.0%	Positive
Diploma Exam Participation	11	5	3.7%	8.1%	Positive
Diploma Exam Acceptable	6	10	0.6%	3.1%	Negative
Diploma Exam Excellence	5	11	1.0%	2.7%	Negative
Student Migration	9	7	2.2%	2.8%	Positive

To assist in the interpretation of the data in the above Chart 3, consider the following. Diploma Exam Participation and High School Completion are both showing positive trends. In both of these measures, the majority of schools showed a positive trend (11 positive and 5 negative). If we look more closely at the measure of High School Completion we see that the 11 schools that showed a positive trend in this measure had a median change of +3.6% while the 5 schools showing a negative trend had a median change of -2.4%. As a result, not only did the majority of schools show a positive trend but the magnitude of the positive change was larger than the magnitude of the negative change. In comparison, for Diploma Exam Participation the 11 schools that showed a positive trend had a median change of +3.7% while the median change for those showing a negative trend was -8.1%. Since the magnitude of the median change in the negative trending schools is larger than the median change in the positive trending schools we could surmise that the overall positive trend is weaker in Diploma Exam Participation than the positive trend in High School Completion.

One of the key conversations occurring in participating schools from the outset of project was juxtaposing school practices such as streaming with a vision of creating an inclusive community where the learning goals of all students are recognized and adopted. The positive trends in High School Completion, Drop-Out Rate, Diploma Exam Participation and Student Migration may be an indication of how these early conversations led to positive results in the 2009/2010 transitional year. It may be surmised that the mindset of the community was more focused on the needs of the students than on the rules of the school, leading to a more invitational approach to students.

In contrast, the negative trend in Diploma Exam Acceptable and Diploma Exam Excellence may be an indication that, although the communities had become more accepting of student needs, the implications for change in pedagogical practice had not yet been realized. This downward trend might also suggest the early focus of school communities was more focused on structural transformation than on instructional transformation.

The trends reported in *Chart 3: Indication of Trends in Six Measures collected through the 2009/2010 School Year* are difficult to attribute specifically to schools' participation in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. While the 2009/2010 transitional year did not bring wide-scale changes among all participating schools, there was significant change in a small number of the participating schools over the transitional year which may have contributed to the trends. If these trends continue into the final two years of the project, then more confident interpretation will be possible.

Chart 4: Indication of Trends in Six Measures collected through the 2009/2010 School Year is provided on the next page. This chart summarizes the trends in the remaining twelve measures that have been collected up to the 2010/2011 school year.

Chart 4: Indication of Trends in Twelve Measures collected through the 2010/2011 School Year

Measure	Number of schools with a positive trend	Number of schools with a negative trend	Median positive change	Median negative change	Overall Trend
Student - Quality of Education	8	8	1.7%	1.8%	Stable
Student - Quality of Teaching	8	8	2.5%	4.0%	Negative
Parent - Quality of Education	8	6	0.7%	3.3%	Negative
Parent - Quality of Teaching	6	8	3.3%	2.7%	Negative
Parent - Improvement	9	5	6.7%	3.7%	Positive
Parent - Stay the Same	8	6	5.0%	3.5%	Positive
Teacher - Quality of Education	8	7	1.7%	3.3%	Negative
Teacher - Quality of Teaching	10	5	0.8%	1.2%	Positive
Teacher - Improvement	7	8	14.0%	6.4%	Positive
Teacher - Stay the Same	7	8	7.3%	13.4%	Negative
Course Completion	12	4	1.0 courses	0.2 courses	Positive
Intellectual Engagement	12	4	7.0%	2.5%	Positive

Trends that are apparent in the Chart 4 above can be attributed with increased confidence to strategies implemented in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project participating schools. In the above chart, the strongest positive trends are shown in Parent sense of improvement at the school, Course Completion, and Intellectual Engagement. The strongest negative trend is in Teacher sense of the school staying the same. An analysis of these trends might best be done by looking at the relationship between these measures, which will be done later, but there is also some potential in looking at them in isolation.

The positive trend in Intellectual Engagement may be due to the growing focus of the school community on student-centered approaches to learning. For the most part, schools within the project have redesigned structures within their schools to provide opportunities for more student-directed activities and, as a result, participating schools are becoming more student-centered in their thinking. As the focus of the school communities shifts from the creation of structures to the examination of teacher practices that support all students, the relevance of school work may be more apparent in the minds of the student and, as a result, students could be becoming more interested and engaged in their work.

The positive trend in Parents and Teachers sense of improvement at the school could be an indication of the engagement of stakeholders at participating schools. As the project has evolved, principals have been engaging their stakeholders, including parents and teachers, in reflection about current practice and in the exploration of possibilities. The fact that both parents and teachers see that the school is improving may be an indication that both parties are feeling engaged in the process of improvement and are working in concert with the school administration to make their schools better places.

A closer look at Parents and Teachers perception of improvement at the school reveals another trend. *Chart 5: Combined Perception of School Improvement or Staying the Same* below shows the combined responses of parents and teachers who believe that the school has either improved or stayed the same.

Chart 5: Combined Perception of School Improvement or Staying the Same

Measure	Number of schools with a positive trend	Number of schools with a negative trend	Median positive change	Median negative change	Overall Trend
Teacher-Combined Improvement or Stayed the Same	9	6	6.0%	16.5%	Positive
Parent-Combined Improvement or Stayed the Same	11	3	6.3%	1.7%	Positive

It is evident that this measure is trending upwards for both teachers and parents. That is, in both cases the majority of the schools show a positive trend in this measure. However, upon closer examination, it is clear that the positive trend is much stronger for parents than it is for teachers. What is interesting to note is the large median change (-16.5%) for those 6 schools who showed a downward trend in this measure for teachers where the median change (-1.7%) is very low for the three schools who showed a downward trend for this measure with parents. This could be explained as a direct result of challenging traditional teaching practices at the school. Regardless of the effects that change might bring to students and learning, the emphasis of structural change and the focus on student-centered approaches puts teachers and their practice at the center of scrutiny. It can also be argued that moving towards a student-centered approach is challenging the belief systems of the

practitioners that make up the school. As a result, even though the majority of the schools' teachers are reporting improvement and stability those that do not may have strong negative feelings about the direction the school is taking. It is this reality that points to the importance of keeping teachers at the center of dialogue and participating as equals in the decision making about school redesign and transformation of practice. It also points towards the importance of keeping parents and students involved in the collaborative decision making process as they experience change from an entirely different perspective; one that they seemingly welcome more than teachers.

The negative trend in Parent and Teacher satisfaction with the Quality of Education may be a directly linked to the nature of the engagement with both of these stakeholders. As principals engage their communities in this project, part of this engagement involves a critical examination of past practice. It could very well be that the nature of this discussion has led to a broader sense that what has been done at participating schools in the past is no longer appropriate for the future. Part of moving forward in a transformative environment is the opening of a dialogue that may point to dissatisfaction in past practice. This can be a double-edged sword. Opening a critical dialogue on past practice may lead to further dissatisfaction if the end result is not a move toward changing this practice. This is an important lesson to be considered especially by school and jurisdiction leaders as they enter into a deep dialogue about transformation of the education system.

Comparisons between measures collected

Although a discussion of trends in individual measures presented in Chart 3 and Chart 4 leads to some potential learning, it is also instructive to consider the relationship in trends between measures collected. The following analysis is based on looking at the project as a whole through examination of trends among median measures of all 16 participating schools. It is important to state that the trends described below are not necessarily attributable to each individual school. While the general trends can be attributed to the project as a whole, there are some schools within the project whose measures contradict the trends described below.

Diploma Exam Participation vs. Diploma Exam Performance

Chart 3 above shows that participation in diploma examinations is trending upward while performance in these exams (as reported through acceptable and excellence standing) is on a downward trend. At first glance this almost appears as a truism. The more students you "allow" to take a diploma examination, the more a school runs a risk of having students struggle in these exams. As is evident in Chart 3 this phenomenon is playing out in several of the participating schools. However, what is not evident in the chart is the reaction of principals and their staffs to this phenomenon.

One would surmise that a school staff faced with these inversely related trends would want to bring an end to the drop in diploma examination performance by "stemming the tide" of students flowing into diploma examination courses. On the contrary though, principals and their staffs are adhering to the invitational, student-centered attitude that has attracted more students to these courses. The response has suggested a reflective examination of instructional practice and assessment approaches. Rather than focusing on the "deficiency of the student" that is in the course, the professional dialogue is turning towards the actions teachers will need to undertake to support the students who choose to be with them. The nature of the dialogue among participating schools is that trends in diploma examination participation rates and trends in diploma examination performance

do not have to be inversely related. Most participants believe that a continued focus on instructional practice will demonstrate that these two measures are not inversely related.

Quality of Education and Teaching vs. School Improvement

A rather curious result has emerged in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project and is evident in Chart 4. There are downward trends in both parents' and teachers' perception of the Quality of Education and parents' and students' perception of the Quality of Teaching, but a strong upward trend in measures of parents' and teachers' perception of school improvement. At first this seems to be a conflicting result. How can stakeholders express a drop in the quality of education yet at the same time express a belief that the school is improving? This might be explained, again, by considering the nature of the discourse that is emerging among the 16 participating schools in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. Exploration of opportunities brought about by the removal of the 25-hour requirement has led schools to examine the reality of past practice with their stakeholders. The 25-hour requirement, Alberta's expression of the Carnegie Unit, has led to practices that focus the attention of schools on the standardization of teaching approaches. In the dialogue that has arisen among project schools, the removal of the Carnegie Unit has shifted the focus of conversation and planning to one of meeting the needs of individual students. It could be that an unintended consequence of the engagement of all stakeholders in this dialogue is a collective realization that what has happened in the past at these schools was not as supportive of individual students as it should be. As a result, both parents and teachers may have been inclined to have been critical of practice at the school as interpreted through the questions on Education Quality and Quality of Teaching.

However, these same parents and teachers are now engaged with the school in finding a new path for the school. The recognition that past practice may need improvement is matched with the realization that the community is engaged in a process to make it better. As such, the two results do not seem to be at odds. Perhaps these communities are accepting that change is coming for a reason. That is, their school is not engaged in a process of "change for change's sake".

Student Satisfaction vs. Student Outcomes

Comparing the results for measures of student satisfaction (Quality of Education and Quality of Teaching) with measures of student outcomes (Course Completions and Intellectual Engagement) reveals another contradiction. While student perceptions of Quality of Education show neither a positive or negative trend, the Quality of Teaching shows a slight negative trend. However, student outcome measures show some of the strongest positive trends in all measures collected. Course Completion is upward and Intellectual Engagement demonstrates a very strong upward trend. Again, there seems to be a contradiction; how can students suggest that the quality of teaching is trending downwards but their learning outcomes are trending upward?

Understanding the nature of some of the changes at participating schools may explain this perceived contradiction. Moving a school community towards a student-centered approach to learning shifts the locus of control from teachers to students. While this shift casts the student in a role where they can take more ownership in their learning, it also calls upon the student to be more responsible for their learning. The downward trend in Quality of Teaching may be a reaction by students to this shifting reality in project schools. They may be measuring the quality of the "teaching" based on their prior experience with what teachers did with

them in school. At this time, they may not be clearly seeing the benefit that this approach is bringing to their interest and motivation to learn (Intellectual Engagement) or their ability to complete courses.

It is apparent in comparing these measures that changes implemented at participating schools may not only be challenging the beliefs of teachers but also the beliefs of students themselves. This amplifies the importance of deeply and authentically engaging all stakeholders in the decision-making process when considering change. It also raises the importance of sharing data with all stakeholders and opening the data to shared interpretation.

Appendix D: Participating Schools Summaries

Following are summaries of strategies and approaches at each of the participating schools. Information in these summaries is gleaned from the annual report submitted by each participating principal in the spring of each year. A summary is provided for each of the two years that have been completed to give the reader a sense of the evolution of implementation at each school.

Archbishop O'Leary High School

Jurisdiction: Edmonton Catholic Separate School District
Location: Edmonton
Grades: 10–12
Population: 1527

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

Two initiatives were implemented over the 2009/2010 school year at Archbishop O'Leary. In the first initiative students who registered in Design Studies over the year were able to download an on-line design program onto their home computers allowing them to access their projects both at home and at school. This provided the opportunity to have design students extend their learning beyond the confines of the school timetable. The second initiative was the establishment of the Religion 25/35 Christian Action Academy. Students were registered in both Religion 25 and 35 courses concurrently in the first semester. The courses were scheduled in the timetable for an entire afternoon which allowed students to engage in Christian service in placements outside of the school.

Although both of these initiatives did not require any changes to the school-wide timetable they required teachers to explore significant changes to the delivery of the coursework. In both cases teachers found alternatives to traditional face-to-face instruction and were able to support students in meaningful ways both inside and outside of the boundaries of the school timetable and physical structure of the building. The end result was an observed improvement in the learning conditions for the students involved in these specific initiatives as well as a sense of improvement in the overall atmosphere at the school.

Overall, the initiatives launched during the Flexibility Enhancement Project have given O'Leary students the flexibility to work past whatever boundaries were previously hindering their achievement. For instance, the completion of Christian Service hours is a major roadblock to some students' completion of Religion 25 and 35. Those students now have the option of the Christian Action Academy (CAA), which allows them to spend half of their scheduled semester out in the community doing Christian Service, not simply learning about it. Not only does the CAA remove that roadblock to success, but it significantly enhanced the quality of the life learning of the students enrolled. Students are now making real life connections to the course curriculum, and getting a more authentic Christian education. There is no doubt that the students enrolled in our new or alternative courses are benefitting from the Project, but we have also found that the overall atmosphere in the school is improving as students begin to appreciate new course options, greater flexibility, and a sense that their school is taking their personal needs seriously.

As the school moves into the pilot project these two initiatives will continue and other initiatives are being planned including:

- **Fast-track Social Studies** – This initiative targets students who are maintaining a high academic average. Time will be blocked in the timetable for the entire year for students to progress through Social 10-1, 20-1 and 30-1 by the end of the school year. As the amount of time blocked is reduced from what traditionally would be needed to progress through these three courses, time will be available for students to explore other coursework.
- **Science Academy** – Science 20 and Science 30 are made available to students in a combination course scheduled over a semester. Outcomes from both courses will be “re-bundled” into meaningful projects for students. The combination course will focus on hands-on lab work and will include field trip opportunities.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The 2010/2011 school year saw the continuation of both the Christian Action Academy and the technology supported Design Studies program at Archbishop O’Leary. Both of these programs have provided alternative learning environments for students that have resulted in increased engagement of students, higher quality work and increased rates of course completion. Enrolments in these programs continue to grow giving evidence of their appeal to the student body.

Learning from the Christian Action Academy and the Design Studies program has led to an expansion of offerings, based on student input, that lead to further choice of delivery methods. This expansion includes:

- **Science Academy** – students are registered in a Science 20 Science 30 program in a 9 credit time slot. The Science Academy puts an emphasis on the interdisciplinary connections between Chemistry, Physics and Biology and instructional practice reflects a focus on issues rather than the acquisition of content outcomes.
- **Virtual Art 11, 21, 31** – These courses are designed to be student-led and self-directed under the supervision of the Art teacher. Technology will support the connection between the students and the teacher with students scheduled with the Art teacher but attendance is optional.
- **Fast Track Social Studies 10-1, 20-1, 30-1** – This program offers the full high school Social Studies Program in three concurrent trimesters in the Grade 10 year providing opportunities for students to pursue other interests in future years at the school. This accelerated program proved very successful with 100% of the students receiving their credits in Social Studies 30-1 and the cohort scoring an average of 71% on the Diploma Examination.
- **Math 35 AP** – This course designed to meet the requirements for the AP Calculus program is targeted for students who generally have a full timetable. As a result, a cohort model was designed to accommodate individual student timetables through a combination of in-class and out-of-class meeting times.

In addition to the above enhancements to offering students alternative delivery options for specific courses, the school piloted an alternative bell schedule for the entire school community that incorporated a “Flex Block” in the middle of the day. Period lengths for scheduled classes were shortened to create a block in the middle of the day where students were given the freedom to select tutorials or help sessions where they received

assistance with their scheduled courses. The incorporation of the Flex Block was extremely well received by students and teachers. The school is planning on incorporating the Flex Block into its regular timetable over the 2011/2012 school year. When asked about the value of the Flex Block a student replied: *"I felt I could have time to ask teachers for help with difficult concepts and also that it increased my interest in subjects and involvement in my school. Subjects were easier to grasp and I felt more alert in my classes."*

Two other programs that will be brought into the school in the 2011/2012 school year are the Production Performance Academy and Science 10 Again. The Production Performance Academy is a new course offering that will focus on the 'behind the scenes' production of a major drama performance. Students will be timetabled into a 5-credit time slot where they will have opportunity to acquire 10-15 credits through mastery learning. The Science 10 Again program is designed for students who did not successfully meet the outcomes of Science 10. These students will be given an opportunity to receive targeted instruction in areas where they had not first succeeded.

Change at the school has led to a more focused culture and has resulted in a marked increase in the Intellectual Engagement measure from the *Tell Them From Me* survey. The more focused climate of learning has led to the generation of more ideas about how to meet students' learning needs. While this has been a very positive shift in the culture of the school it has challenged the administrative team to find creative ways to schedule the school to accommodate the flow of ideas. However, these challenges are overshadowed by the positive results. As stated by the administrator responsible for scheduling the school:

"By giving students enriched access to educational tools such as on-line learning, experiential learning, faster paced coursework, practical application and virtual classrooms we have permanently opened the classroom doors for students to pursue their passions and be credited for what they learn and achieve. In the past, any learning that took place outside of the timetable "did not exist" and therefore could not be credited..."

Bellerose Composite High School

Jurisdiction: St. Albert Protestant Separate School District

Location: St. Albert

Grades: 10–12

Population: 860

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

The 2009/2010 transitional year at Bellerose Composite was used to engage the full school community in a dialogue about potential changes to program organization and delivery and, at the same time, explore some alternative approaches in specific areas.

Community engagement took the form of surveys, large-scale and focus group meetings with students, meetings with parents and ongoing meetings and discussions with staff. Included in the exploration of possibilities was a series of visits to schools in the area as well as other schools participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project culminating in reports back to the full staff for consideration. Input and

discussions were open and public with all stakeholder groups leading to a high level of “buy-in” when final decisions were made.

In semester two of the 2009/2010 school year alternative delivery of program was explored in two areas. First, a significant change was made to the Knowledge and Employability Program (K&E). In both Grade 10 and 11 teachers were assigned to teach core areas (either Math and Science or English and Social) and integrate activities that would lead their students to successful completion of Physical Education. As one teacher was managing the outcomes from two core areas for a group of students and had the background to engage students in physical education activities, the teacher was able to bundle curricular outcomes in these areas that met the specific needs of the students. Also, it was noted that the teachers were able to develop meaningful relationships with these students helping to motivate them to complete outcomes from three program areas in ways that kept them interested and engaged.

A second initiative focused on the English 20-2 program at the school. In second semester students enrolled in English 20-2 were given the opportunity to progress through outcomes at an accelerated rate and write the final examination in May. If students finished the course early they were able to use the remaining time to pursue other courses or to turn their attention to other coursework where they may need additional help. A set of criteria was established for students to be given the opportunity to fast track their English course. This approach was beneficial for both those students who fast-tracked their English course as well as for those who did not as this smaller group had more potential contact with the teacher until the end of the semester.

Experiences with the above initiatives and the input received from the community engagement led to a decision to continue with the initiatives in the future. As well, the school will be implementing the following beginning the 2010/2011 school year:

- The timetable will be rebuilt to include a daily “Flex Block” where students will have an opportunity to direct their learning to areas of need and/or interest. During the Flex Block teachers will be available to students who require assistance.
- There will be two alternative Math programs available for students. One will be a Pure Math 20 and Pure Math 30 extended program where students will be scheduled for additional time to complete these two courses. There will also be a Math 30 Pure short program for students who have the ability and interest to accelerate their Math program leaving room to study other areas.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The 2010/2011 school year saw a number of initiatives at Bellerose Composite. The changes implemented in the Knowledge and Employability Program were continued and improved upon based on the experiences in the transitional year. The opportunity for students to accelerate through English 20-1 was also continued. A number of opportunities for individual students to pursue areas of interest leading to credit in Career and Technology Studies or Fine Arts were provided at the school. Additional time was made available who chose to take an extended Grade 11 or 12 Mathematics program as well as the option for an accelerated Math program was provided. These strategies were born out of discussions with students, parents and teachers focused on ways to better meet the individual needs of students.

The most significant change made at Bellerose Composite over the 2010/2011 school year was the implementation of a new timetable that features longer breaks between classes and the insertion of a daily Flex Block. The Flex Block is a 75 minute period in the middle of the day that is available for students to see teachers for assistance, work individually or in groups to complete assignments, pursue option courses (such as Leadership or Career and Technology Studies modules), participate in teams and clubs and eat lunch. This change in the bell schedule has contributed greatly to a reduction in the stress at the school and has cast students in a role as directors of the learning for a significant portion of their day.

The change in the bell schedule and the accompanying shifts in teacher and student roles are resulting in the following:

- Reduction of student stress/anxiety through alternative delivery;
- Increase opportunities for success by permitting students more time for one-on-one interaction with teachers;
- Increasing motivation to catch up when students fall behind in a course;
- Permitting teachers to re-teach segments to small groups of students who are struggling;
- Seeing a reduction in insufficient marks/not handed in assignments;
- Permitting students more opportunity to successfully complete group projects;
- Allowing students the opportunity to experience a variety of teaching styles;
- Allowing teachers to explore alternative teaching methods.

As the school continues to evolve the dialogue among parents, students and teachers is leading to a generation of many ideas to better meet the needs of students. The community is more open to exploring ideas and willing to take risks to change for the benefit of better learning conditions for students. The open dialogue with stakeholders and the corresponding changes that are being made at the school is reaping its rewards. The school has seen a marked increase in the following indicators of student satisfaction:

- Percentage of students who feel they can get help when they need it;
- Percentage of students who feel their learning needs are being met;
- Percentage of students who feel that their input is considered, respected and valued.

Bishop McNally High School

Jurisdiction: Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District
Location: Calgary
Grades: 10–12
Population: 1167

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year, the principal and district administration focused on bringing both the school and wider district community together to “brainstorm” possibilities for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project at Bishop McNally High School. The principal established a group of lead teachers who worked collaboratively to review data and share ideas of ways that program organization and delivery could be

redesigned to meet student need. A parallel process was implemented at the wider district level that invited high school teachers and administrators from around the district to share their ideas about possibilities with increased flexibility. These two processes raised a high level of awareness at both the school and district level about the project.

During the 2009/2010 year, the school implemented two strategies as part of its exploration of redesign. The school has had in place a teacher advisory system since its inception. During the transitional year teacher advisors were asked to focus on at least two students per advisory that were identified as students who were "at-risk". Teacher advisors were expected to keep in close contact with the identified students and their parents and were given tools to help them monitor the progress of these students. Statistics were kept on the number of interactions with students, subject area teachers and parents. At the conclusion of the year the identified group of students earned an average of 36.5 credits.

A second strategy was the development and delivery of a combined Learning Strategies/CALM/CTR 1010 course to support a group of mild/moderate learning disabled students. This course was collaboratively developed by two teachers to explore the possibility of curriculum redesign given the additional flexibility afforded the school through their participation in the project.

The end result of the school and district engagement process coupled with the experiences of the school staff in the two explored strategies led to the development of the project plan to be implemented starting in September 2010. The key components of this plan include:

- The redesign of the school timetable into a 5-period day from a 4-period day. The additional block of time reduces the overall time assigned to each course but reduces overall class sizes throughout the school. Teachers were given the opportunity to collaboratively plan for the reduction of time per course by redesigning their course delivery over the spring and summer of 2010. In addition, the redesigned timetable included a "late start" Friday to give opportunities for teachers to meet on an ongoing basis throughout the year to continue collaborative planning.
- The institution of larger blocks of time on Fridays to encourage project-based approaches to program delivery.
- The alignment of blocks of time for CTS, Fine Arts and ESL courses throughout the timetable to provide larger amounts of time to explore practical outcomes in depth.
- A continued focus on the work of the Teacher Advisor to support individual students.
- An expansion of a student resource center that provides ongoing support for students and provides access to self-directed learning opportunities for students.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

Bishop McNally High School began the 2010/2011 school year with the newly implemented 5-period schedule. As predicted, many students took advantage of the additional period block to explore areas of study that would not have been previously available. Students who were well on track to complete their graduation requirements did not necessarily register in additional coursework but, instead, had a block of time to engage in independent study. The additional period block met its goal of providing students additional choice while keeping class sizes at a reasonable level.

This new scheduling approach created two new realities that the community worked through over the 2010/2011 school year. First, as students were not expected to fill their schedules with classes there were additional opportunities for students to use time in the school day to direct their learning. Secondly, as the instructional time per course was reduced some teachers, especially those teachers teaching in core Grade 12 areas, had to adjust their approach to manage the outcomes of their programs in a reduced amount of time.

These two new realities led to the school exploring the following areas:

- *Credit Recovery* – mathematics students who did not complete the outcomes of a course within the first semester were given the opportunity to work with a teacher to address gaps in their learning over the second semester without re-registering in the course. Students were given targeted instruction in a “pull-out” approach and were afforded the opportunity to re-assess outcomes to complete their coursework.
- *Learning Center* – a learning center that had been previously existed at the school was expanded to provide an option for students who were unassigned to a class throughout the day. The Learning Center was staffed by four teachers and an assistant so that students were able to get support in their coursework at any time during the day.
- *Diploma Preparation Course* – the school provided a Diploma Preparation Course at the school in the evening to support students in their preparation for the examinations in January and June.
- *CTS courses at Intermediate and Senior Levels* - Higher level CTS courses were offered in double blocks for one quarter session as students needed more time to complete the lessons in a 140 minute period. Beginner level courses were only offered in one block time slots.
- *After School Classes* - Three courses in the CTS areas were offered from 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Teachers in the Culinary Arts, Cosmetology and Automotives areas offered modules not covered during the school year for three credits. Students would stay after school and take these special interest courses in: baking desserts, fashion hair styles and automatic transmissions. All 36 students passed these 40 hours courses and enjoyed the new modules.

Data collected during the 2010/2011 school year indicated that there was an overall increase in course completion throughout the school especially in the area of Career and Technology Studies and Sciences. Results from student surveys also indicated that students were very positive about the change to the timetable and appreciated the opportunities it provided them to expand their learning. However, results on diploma examinations were down from previous years.

Results gathered over the 2010/2011 school year have provided the school with the impetus to focus their efforts on instructional approaches. The staff has gathered around an Instructional Coaching resource and will be working on collaborative teaching approaches as a major focus of professional development over the 2011/2012 school year.

Catholic Central High School

<u>Jurisdiction:</u>	Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division
<u>Location:</u>	Lethbridge
<u>Grades:</u>	10–12
<u>Population:</u>	832

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

The principal assigned one of the vice-principals at the school to take the lead in working with the school community over the transitional year. A team of interested teachers was assembled who identified the following areas of need to be addressed at the school:

- Opportunities for students to learn at their own pace and at their own skill level.
- Increased time for students and teachers to meet individually or in small groups
- Increased time for students to build essential skills
- Increased flexibility for students who find regular school attendance and regular classroom structures difficult.

Over the transitional year changes were made in the following areas as an exploration of strategies to address the needs outlined above:

- CTS – students were able to demonstrate master of learning outcomes at a pace commensurate with their abilities, interest and needs versus at a pace determined by the timetable;
- Knowledge and Employability – students were assigned to a teacher for a block of time to progress through English, Social, Math and Science in a more flexible format designed by the teacher with input from the students. It was found that flexible scheduling allowed for these students to successfully complete more core work in a more relaxed, student-directed setting.
- Science and Math 10-3/20-3 – students had an opportunity to progress through these subjects in a self-directed learning format at an individualized pace.

The following observation was made at the conclusion of the Transitional Year:

- We see a paradigm shift in thinking already in both our students and teachers from our transitional year. The focus is now on – What do students need to know? By what methods do students learn best? - rather than, “How much time do we have to cover the material?”

At the conclusion of the transitional year, these strategies proved to be effective in supporting the students in the identified programs and a decision was made to expand the strategies to reach the broader student population. The additional strategy that will be implemented in the 2010/2011 school year as the pilot project phase begins:

- Flexible Scheduling for additional learning time – the timetable will be altered shifting from a four-period day to a five-period day. The additional block will be incorporated into the middle of the day where students will have a block of time to eat lunch, meet with teachers, be involved in club activities, attend enrichment classes, seek additional help or pursue self-directed learning. Teachers will be available to students at this time.

Future years of the project will include the addition of classes after 3:00 p.m. delivered within a flexible structure as well as the exploration of a blended CTS/English/Social Studies program being offered in a single block of time.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The 2010/2011 school year brought a major change for the Catholic Central school community. A new school was built on the west side of the city that serves as being a second campus for Catholic Central. Both the old and the new campus are administered by the same principal. This dual campus approach to school organization has created both opportunities and challenges for the school community. The new facility offers some facilities and programming that are not available at the old campus. A good example is the Pre-Engineering Program that exists in a specialized space on the new campus. As a result, in the middle of the day, students shuttle between the two campuses. The institution of the Flex Block in the middle of the school day has accommodated this movement of students between the two campuses as well as opening opportunities for students who do not shuttle to direct their learning.

One of the challenges was the ability to continue with a Teacher Advisory Program that was instituted the previous year. The movement of students from campus to campus made the scheduling of advisory time difficult.

The combination of the dual campus reality and the institution of the Flex Block has opened the minds of the professional staff and led to innovative approaches to program delivery. The end result has been a growth in the following areas:

- The development of cross-disciplinary programs such as the Humanities/Career and Technology Studies (CTS) approach;
- Increased use of technology to support student learning;
- Flexible pacing and ability for students to direct their learning towards areas of interest such as a mastery learning approach in CTS;
- Teachers utilizing non-traditional spaces to engage students in their learning.

As the year progressed, it became apparent that teachers needed to be more intentional around the use of Flex Blocks at the school. As a result, the 2011/2012 school year will focus on communication strategies between teachers and students to increase the productive use of student directed time.

Although it may not be solely attributable to the strategies implemented as a result of participation in the High School Flexibility Project, Intellectual Engagement, as measured by the *Tell Them From Me* Survey, has increased 9 percentage points from the 2009/2010 school year. This increase may be due, in part, to the collaborative efforts of teachers in exploring alternatives made possible through increased flexibility as well as the school-wide focus on instructional practices through professional development associated with the local AISI project.

École Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys

<u>Jurisdiction:</u>	Greater Southern Separate Catholic Francophone Education Region
<u>Location:</u>	Calgary
<u>Grades:</u>	K–12
<u>Population:</u>	520 (Total); 40 (Grades 10–12) (Numbers for September 2011-12)

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

Over the transitional year the principal worked with a leadership team comprised of a vice-principal and several teachers to develop the project plan. The team focused its attention on two major areas over the transitional year: enhancing relationships between students, teachers and the home through the implementation of a teacher-advisory system for students from Grades 7–12 and, providing some time for students to direct their learning through the institution of flexible time in the timetable for students from Grades 9–12.

The teacher advisory was a focus of professional development and professional discussion among the secondary teachers of the school. During the transitional year a 15 minute teacher advisory (TA time) was instituted to begin the day for all Grade 7–12 students. The purpose of this time was to give teachers an opportunity to build relationships with a group of students at a particular grade level. The teacher advisor (TA) was to monitor progress of students in their group, encourage students to use the resources available to them at the school to support their learning and to become the primary contact between the home and school for their group of students. The 15 minute TA time was kept free of any curriculum but was used, at times, to support the administrative requirements of the school (i.e., course registration, demographic checks, etc).

The planning team also explored the addition of “Flex Blocs” for Grades 9–12 students in the second semester of the transitional year. These were 60-minute blocks of time imbedded into the timetable three times over a 6-day cycle. Flex Blocs were incorporated strategically into the timetable as replacements to regularly scheduled class periods. During Flex Blocs a group of teachers was identified to be available to provide assistance to students. Students from Grades 9–12 were free to approach teachers as they required their assistance, work together in informal groups on their courses of study or work individually in an area of choice. There were areas throughout the school that were made available to students to support their work in Flex Blocs and students were made aware of which rooms that teachers were available to them for support.

The following excerpt from the school’s year-end report describes the rationale of these two strategies and how they work together to support student learning:

Students who leave high school need to be responsible and engaged learners, able to ask questions and seek answers, be creative thinkers and problem solvers. The Flex Blocs are designed to help students manage their time, work collaboratively with their peers, organize their time and work load. The increased TA time offers a structured, welcoming place to start the school day. Each TA also teaches the students in his/her group, develops a personal relationship with the students and is responsible for communicating information to parents.

Both TA and Flex Blocs have been carried forward into the project plan for the school. Flex Blocs have been extended to daily opportunities for Grades 9–12 students.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The 2010/2011 school year saw a continuance of both the Teacher-Advisory and Flex Blocs at Ecole Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys. Both of these additions made to the school in the previous school year have brought the school closer to the desired goal of creating a school focused on the needs of its students. Given the success of Flex Blocs for supporting students from Grades 9 – 12, the school will be extending this opportunity to the Grade 7 and 8 students in the 2011/2012 school year.

Of note is the change of atmosphere at the school. Discipline issues have reduced in the secondary (Grades 7 – 12) and the principal reports that *“there is a relaxed sense in the school.”* However, the introduction of Flex Blocs has stretched both teachers and students to adjust their approach to teaching and learning. Flex Blocs have created significant opportunities for students to take ownership in their learning and to demonstrate their ability to make good decisions to support their learning. As would be expected, this opportunity was not embraced equally among all students and teachers at the school needed to reflect and measure their responses to this reality with a view to the overarching vision of where the school was heading. This led to valuable teacher dialogue and, as the year progressed, to a growing commitment to student-directed approaches from both teachers and students.

The professional dialogue did not end with the use of Flex Blocs at the school. The 2010/2011 school year also brought about a third focus to the project – interdisciplinary approaches to learning. Under the guidance of key staff members, outcomes from the Programs of Study have been explored for curricular connections and teachers began to consider collaborative approaches to the delivery and assessment of outcomes. This has led to a heightened sense of the pedagogical decisions that teachers are making and provided opportunities for teachers to take a fresh approach to their coursework. Building on the learning that has been gained through Teacher Advisory and Flex Blocs, the school will be making a concerted effort to bring collaborative interdisciplinary approaches to program outcomes as a goal for the 2011/2012 school year.

Edwin Parr Composite Community School

Jurisdiction: Aspen View Regional Division
Location: Athabasca
Grades: 8–12
Population: 613

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year the principal at Edwin Parr Composite worked with the staff to explore the current use of time at the school with a view to designing an alternative bell schedule to better support student learning. Prior to 2009/2010 the staff had been involved in a year-long professional development focus exploring assessment for learning strategies. There was a desire to redesign the timetable and bell schedule to better support what was being learned by the staff about assessment strategies.

Over the transitional year, the principal held monthly meetings of staff and parents to engage both groups in the process of determining the final redesign. Meetings were used to provide an explanation of how introducing added flexibility into the timetable would benefit student learning. As well meetings were used to explore potential alternative timetables and bell schedules. The final outcome of the process was a timetable and bell schedule with the following features that will be implemented beginning the 2010/2011 school year:

- Moving from a 4 period 82-minute blocked schedule to a 5 period 65-minute blocked schedule.
- One of the five blocks serves as a “flex block” where students have an opportunity to direct their learning. In the remaining four blocks of time students are scheduled into classes.
- Every 20 days students will select an area to work in during the flex block over the 20 day period. Students will be able to direct their learning to meet their interest and needs over the flex block. Students may use the flex block to add optional coursework (i.e., CTS) that is not scheduled in their timetable or may use the time for enrichment and remediation opportunities linked to their scheduled classes.
- This approach guarantees a “bedrock” of school-directed time for each course of study complemented by flexible time for students to direct their learning to support their studies or explore optional areas of study. The flexible block allows students to personalize their learning experience at the school.

Over the three years of the project the intent is to decrease the bedrock of school directed time and increase the flexible student directed time. The link between the alternative timetable and the ongoing professional development focus on assessment for learning is captured in the words of the principal:

“This transformation from teacher managed content and production to student directed content and production on the field of relevant curricula marks the essence of our project as it entails a massive shift in assessment, grading and reporting practices.”

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The 2010/2011 school year saw the beginning of the implementation of the alternative bell schedule at Edwin Parr Composite Community School. However, the changes at the school went far beyond the routines of ringing bells; they were built around the professional community’s understanding of assessment for learning practices. The end result was a significant shift in the rhythm of the day coupled with an intentional, strategic approach to the use of time to support learning.

The major shift in the experience of students and teachers at the school was the incorporation of a fifth block of time in the school day to accommodate “Core-X” and “Option-X” time. The intent of Core-X and Option-X time was to allow students to direct their learning in areas of need or interest. The use of this time by both teachers and students was guided by the tenets of assessment for learning practices as outlined below:

- **Intentional Learning Goals:** Students were given the opportunity to direct their learning during the fifth block of the day in either Core areas of their coursework (English, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies) or optional areas of their coursework. Whatever their choice, students were expected to present their intentions to teachers during this time through written learning goals. This created a purposeful atmosphere in the school during this fifth block as students not only had freedom of choice but the responsibility to intentionally direct their freedom towards the attainment of personalized learning goals.

- **Timely feedback:** The teachers' role during the fifth block in Core-X was characterized by the need for students to gain appropriate and timely feedback to their work. As a result, the role of the teacher during the fifth block was not to manage and control the learning process but to respond to the learning of the students who chose to be involved with the teacher. The delivery of "content" was to be reserved for the other four blocks of time where students were scheduled to engage in learning activities managed by the teacher. If a student selected Option-X for their fifth block, this time may have been managed by the teacher as a student may have communicated a learning goal to successfully complete the outcomes in an optional area such as Career and Technology Studies. As a result, teachers would potentially direct the student learning for this learning goal but the learning goal was determined by the student and not the timetable.
- **The Centrality of Standards:** As the fifth block of time inserted into the timetable created circumstances where students were able to personalize their learning experiences, it was critical that all teachers had a clear and aligned view of the standards for progress through each discipline. This led to the need for collaborative work by teachers to explore the outcomes of each of their assigned curricular areas and ensure that they were on the "same page" as their colleagues in supporting student progress through these outcomes.

The addition of Core-X and Option-X put a sharp focus on the work of the school. As the year progressed, other administrative routines were re-examined and the community began to shift the emphasis of decisions made at the school. As an example, attendance at the school began to shift from a simple counting of the number of classes that a student attended to examining the quality of the experiences as student and teacher roles evolved.

Summarized by the principal, the work of the school over the 2010/2011 school year helped to put a sharp focus on the following pedagogical practices:

- Learning goals are serving an elevated function in student and teacher work and discourse.
- Learning time has been adjusted toward student need.
- There is a greater focus on improving as a school in a very deliberate and focused manner. This is spoken of as a noticeable growing commitment exhibited in behavior and speech as a true professional learning community.
- Assessment and grading practices are reflecting the choice that students have and the standards which govern the areas of their learning.
- Student work has just started to shift away from repetition of effort to examining/inquiring for knowledge.

Grande Prairie Composite High School

<u>Jurisdiction:</u>	Grande Prairie School District
<u>Location:</u>	Grande Prairie
<u>Grades:</u>	10–12
<u>Population:</u>	1631

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

After considerable discussion with school staff in the year prior to the 2009/2010 transitional year, the school administration instituted a redesigned bell schedule to include a “flex block”. The bell schedule for the transitional year was comprised of five 75 minute periods with the middle 75 minutes acting as a dedicated flex block. During the flex block students were given the opportunity to access teachers to support their work in the regularly scheduled classes. Students were able to receive support for any area in the school as teachers for all areas were made available. During this flex block students were expected to take a break for lunch as well. Another change was made to institute a “quarter system” for three-credit classes rather than an alternating Day A/Day B schedule to accommodate 3-credit courses.

The combination of the flex block and quarter system has led to some observed benefits for students at the school:

- As students have greater responsibility and control over the flex block time they are able to direct their learning to areas of personal need more readily;
- Assignment completion in courses is trending upward;
- The quarter system allows students to focus on a smaller number of courses over an extended period of time;
- As students have the flex block imbedded in the middle of their day, more Grade 11 and 12 students are consciously choosing a full schedule.

In addition to the redesigned bell schedule and timetable, the school implemented a condensed Math 14/24 and Science 14/24 program. These condensed programs allowed the teachers to revisit the outcomes of these programs with a view to determining the essential outcomes encouraging a more active-oriented stance to the students’ learning in these programs. Students were assessed using a final summative exam that was parallel to exams written in past years. The success rate in both the science and math program increased dramatically over previous years. There was also an increase in the standard of excellence in the Math 14 program. For students who did not successfully complete the 14 level program, there was an opportunity to retake the course within the same time frame effectively leading to them passing the course in the same amount of time as they would have in previous years. Given that these courses were condensed, students had an opportunity to explore other option areas of interest. The end result was an observed increase in the retention rate of students who had traditionally dropped out before the end of the school year.

The school will continue with the two strategies outlined above over the next three years of this project. In addition, an examination of a teacher advisory program is underway with the entire staff and administration. It is expected that a teacher advisory program will be instituted at the school in the next school year. As well, the

staff and administration continues to explore other opportunities to adapt course approaches for individual students throughout all program areas.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

Due to the successes of strategies, Grande Prairie Composite High School has continued with the changes that were introduced in the 2009/2010 transitional year: Flex Block, condensed Math 14/24 and Science 14/24 programs and “quartered” 3-credit courses. These approaches were expanded with the addition of expanded Music programming and Outdoor Education/Physical Education programming. Flex block continued to provide opportunities for students to direct their learning in making personalized choices to support their coursework and the expanded and condensed classes allowed students to complete coursework in environments which were more flexible and attuned to the specific curricular areas and the specific needs of the students. Another strategy that was implemented in the 2010/2011 school year was a timetabled credit recovery time for a teacher to work with students who had failed English and Social -2 classes to support them as they completed the work required to earn their credits. These newly implemented approaches have led to early success as evidenced by the increase in credit completion for students entering their Grade 12 year in the 2011/2012 school year.

However, the most notable difference at Grande Prairie Composite is a shift in culture among professional staff at the school. The myriad of new approaches to program delivery has come about from an intentional effort on the part of instructional staff to audit programming and explore alternative assessment practices to better support students. Administration at the school report a heightened awareness of instructional practice among groups of teachers and a willingness to critically examine practice and investigate approaches that will better support student success. As reported by a school administrator:

“Key to the success of our work in this regard has been the willingness of our teachers to embrace Flex block and to dig deeply into their various programs of studies to ensure that delivery, assessment and outcomes are aligned...teachers are putting their students and their individual needs ahead of the delivery of content.”

The school has built on teacher enthusiasm to explore practice and implement innovative approaches by aligning a number of initiatives and changes including:

- The establishment of a Redesign Committee of sixteen teachers representing the various departments from around the school which serves as the leadership group in implementing further innovations at the school;
- The alignment of a number of initiatives including an examination of practices in the Finnish school system supported by the Alberta Teachers’ Association, workshops exploring Understanding by Design, the implementation of an International Baccalaureate Program, the engagement of the full staff in a literacy development project named “Thirteen Parameters”, and an exploration of classroom assessment practices;
- A change in approach with staff meetings that focus on the sharing of instructional practices and collaborative examination of practice rather than a simply a sharing of information.

Whereas the school’s approach to the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project was initially focused on changing the structures of the school schedule, conversations are now focused on instructional practice. It is apparent that changing the structures may have served as a catalyst to the professional conversations that

have emerged over this last school year. Although teachers are enthusiastic about the direction the school has taken the challenge is one of time. The school has committed to supporting the Redesign Committee by meeting during the school day and providing substitute coverage for these individuals. Also, the establishment of the Flex Block opened time in the day for other groups of teachers to meet and discuss pedagogy and collaboratively plan for instruction. However, the desire for change and the growth in innovative ideas requires even more time for teachers to meet and collaborate.

The end result of this change in culture is a growth in professionalism and a deep sense of satisfaction in the work that is being done at the school. As expressed by one of the teachers:

"I have never done as much educational reading and reflection on teaching practice as I have the past year and a half, probably since university! Having 25 years of teaching experience, however, has made this reflection and analysis much more meaningful..."

Holy Trinity Academy

Jurisdiction: Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division

Location: Okotoks

Grades: 10–12

Population: 736

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

The project plan for Holy Trinity Academy has been focused on addressing an issue with one specific program at the school. The school offers an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program that experiences high attrition of students by Grade 12. In surveying students it became apparent that attrition was due in large part to the lack of choices that students were able to make to explore optional areas if they opted for a full IB program.

In response to student input, for the 2009/2010 school year, the school altered the delivery of two programming areas in the IB; Social Studies and Biology. Grade 10 and 11 Social Studies was condensed into a single course utilizing one block of time in the student's schedule. Additional coursework necessary in Biology was delivered as a series of seminars outside of the traditionally scheduled time rather than as a regularly scheduled 3-credit course in the student's timetable. This released some additional time for students to explore option areas.

At the conclusion of the 2009/2010 school year the school reported some significant gains in the retention of students in the later years of the IB program. Specifically, Grade 12 enrolments in IB Social Studies more than tripled (from 8 in the previous year to 25) and enrolments in Grade 12 IB English almost doubled (from 15 in the previous year to 28). Although there was a large increase in retention in the IB program courses, the school reports that some students did not use the additional time in the timetable to explore options. The administration will be working with students to encourage them to explore opportunities for optional studies with the additional time available to them.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The alternative approach to delivery of programs utilizing “seminar classes” scheduled during lunch has continued to be a successful strategy to address the attrition in International Baccalaureate (IB) Program over the 2010/2011 school year. A decision has been made at the school to offer Advanced Placement in place of IB programming in the coming school years but the seminar approach will be a strong consideration in building this new program at Holy Trinity Academy.

The collaboration with other project schools led the administration at the school to consider implementing a school-wide strategy that arises from the flexibility available through the project. Each block of time in the current four-block schedule will be reduced from 84 to 79 minutes to accommodate an additional 20 minute block that will be placed before lunch for *School Wide Scheduled Help*. This additional block will be instituted for the 2011/2012 school year. The intent of this time is to provide students the opportunity to access one-to-one assistance from teachers for work that they have been assigned in their regularly scheduled classes, to work on assigned homework, or, to read.

At the time of writing the *School Wide Scheduled Help* has been instituted for a few weeks and was followed up with a student and staff survey. Early indications are that this additional block has been greatly valued by students and teachers alike. The incorporation of this time has caused the staff to reflect on some of their instructional practices, such as the assignment of homework, which may eventually lead to some change in practice in the future.

J. C. Charyk Hanna School

Jurisdiction: Prairie Land Regional Division
Location: Hanna
Grades: 9–12
Population: 402

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year at J. C. Charyk High School an alternative approach to program design and delivery was explored with a group of identified Grade 10 students. For these students, Math, Science, English and Social Studies coursework was made available to them in a self-directed environment supported by materials constructed by two teachers. The Math and Science courses were made available to the students in the first semester managed by one teacher while the English and Social Studies courses were made available to the student in the second semester managed by a different teacher. The administration at the school interviewed each student and parent who entered the self-directed learning program and observed progress of the students over the year.

In addition to this specific initiative, the administration at the school engaged in a number of meetings with parents and teachers to explore ways that additional flexibility could be made available to all students at the

school. The experience with the self-directed learning initiative combined with the input from meetings led to a realization about the direction of the project for the future. In the words of the principal:

"The biggest success was the evolution from our first project to where it is today. We were able to learn from our planning, and finally realized that parents in traditional communities still want to see traditional schools. By evolving slowly, we are able to keep certain aspects of the traditional school (blocks, classroom structure) and move to some flexibility by way of open courses (afterhours) and flex time throughout the day."

As the school moves into the 2010/2011 school year, self-directed learning will continue to be made available as an option to those students who may want to pursue it. In addition, the bell schedule and timetable will provide opportunities for all students to explore areas of interest through the institution of "Flex Classes" as well as classes scheduled both before and after school.

Flex Classes will run in a 45-minute daily block. During this block of time teachers will be presenting a variety of learning opportunities associated with the coursework as topics of interest and enrichment. Students will have the opportunity to select from the offerings to become involved in extensions to their learning that meets their interest. In addition, tutorials will be offered on a rotating basis in key courses where students will have an opportunity to receive additional assistance to support their success. These tutorials will be offered in the areas of math and science.

Also being introduced in the 2010/2011 school year will be a Teacher Advisor program. Teacher advisors will be responsible for monitoring the progress of a group of students in all areas of coursework. It is hoped that the teacher advisory will enhance relationships between students and teachers as well as between the home and school. A 45-minute period every two weeks will be made available to support the work of the teacher advisory throughout the year.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

As there was little interest from students to pursue self-directed learning approaches, the focus of the 2010/2011 school year at J.C. Charyk shifted towards the institution of Flex Classes and Teacher Advisory.

Flex Classes were generally successful with many students availing themselves of the opportunity to enhance their studies by choosing alternative units of study. However, as the year progressed students became more interested in using the time during Flex Classes to complete assigned work and interest in the enhanced offerings waned.

Teacher Advisory in the school has contributed positively to a caring and productive environment at the school. The time that was dedicated to Advisory, one 40 minute block every three weeks, was originally designed to provide opportunities for advisors to meet with their students to help to guide students in their choice of activities in Flex Classes. However, as the year progressed this time provided valuable opportunities for advisors to work their students in graduation planning. This naturally led to opportunities for teacher advisors and students to connect in meaningful ways giving students advocates at the school.

The 2011/2012 school year will bring about a shift in the approach at the school. The school will be required to return to the four-block, 84 minute bell schedule in order to support sister schools throughout the Division to share video-conference teaching and learning opportunities. The school wishes to retain the advantages that have been gained through the Teacher Advisory and also explore the possibility of providing further choice to its students to enhance their learning through tutorial sessions. As a result, one 84-minute period block will be scheduled for Teacher Advisory each week on a rotating basis throughout the bell schedule. This time will be available for teacher advisors to continue with their advocacy and support work with students and the staff will explore possible ways of integrating tutorials into this time frame.

One notable shift that has been noticed by administration at the school is the heightened level of collaboration among staff. Dialogue around the use of time and the creative flow of ideas has sparked the staff to engage in collaborative planning and deeper pedagogical discussions. Intellectual Engagement at the school, as measured by the *Tell Them From Me* survey has increased 21 percentage points at the school. Although it is difficult to attribute this to any one specific change at the school, administration at the school suggests that the collaborative atmosphere at the school could be a positive factor in this result.

James Fowler High School

Jurisdiction: Calgary School District

Location: Calgary

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1309

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

The 2009/2010 transitional year was used at James Fowler High School to explore a variety of instructional strategies that emerged from the added flexibility afforded in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. The principal introduced the project to his full teaching staff and encouraged innovative action research projects to be designed and implemented over the year. A group of about 20–25 teachers representing various departments in the school agreed to engage in an action research project and attend in monthly meetings to share ideas, report on results and discuss the potential future direction of the project. In addition, a Teacher Advisory committee was formed in the fall of 2009 to “become part of the conversations that would gather the momentum and impact change in the school with regards to student achievement”. The Teacher Advisor committee initiated school-wide discussions and surveys and engaged in school visits and research to inform their work.

Action research projects over the year included:

- A self-directed unit in Mathematics 31 supported by innovative use of an on-line learning management system (Desire 2Learn);
- An integrated Social Studies and English unit of study focusing on a group of ESL learners and the experiences that they brought to Canada from their home countries;
- A cross-strand project-based approach to CTS managed within a team-teaching structure;

- Physical Education programming focused on the needs of an individual student who had not yet met success in attaining the mandatory credits for the program;
- Various explorations of the use of Desire 2Learn (D2L) and other technologies to support student learning.

Based on the results of these projects and the collaborative dialogue that took place over the year the school enters the pilot project phase of the project with a focus on the following areas:

- The establishment of a school-wide teacher advisory (TA) program. The TA program will create a new role for all teachers in the school who will be given a group of students whom they will be responsible for whom they will monitor and advocate over their three years of high school.
- The development of an E-Learning Center that will provide an alternative approach to students who are not successful in the traditional classroom setting. The E-Learning Center will also be used to support all teachers in developing courses in D2L to enrich the learning for all students in their classes.
- Credit recovery options to extend time for students to learn in the optional areas and CTS to support the attainment of credits.
- Combined Core Course/Learning Strategies courses allowing students extended time and a focus on learning strategies to support success in core areas.
- Continued exploration of cross-curricular opportunities offered in a team-teaching environment by interested teachers.
- The addition of an Advanced Placement program at the school to provide expanded choices to students.
- The alignment of academic and non-academic courses in the timetable to allow for ease of migration of students who may be supported from switching streams.
- Institute after school learning opportunities three times per week where students will be able to access help from teachers.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

Of all strategies implemented over the 2010/2011 school year, Teacher Advisory had the largest school-wide impact at James Fowler High School. As the year progressed advisors more consistently involved parents in conversations about students' learning and worked collaboratively with students and parents to guide student decisions around future courses and graduation planning. The teacher advisory has also led to opportunities to bring administration, counseling and teachers together in taking proactive measures to support at-risk students.

Credit recovery approaches, specifically with English Language Learners, has proven helpful in supporting students meet the requirements of core coursework. Of note was the use the April sitting of the diploma examination in providing extended opportunities for some students to gain their credits in a diploma course.

The professional community continues to collaboratively explore instructional practices that lead to student success. Conversations that started in the transitional year are reaping results in the development of alternative approaches to meet individual student need. The regular meetings that took place in the transitional year are credited as being a critical feature in establishing a collaborative culture among the professional staff. Of note is a shift in the community towards looking at issues from a student-centered perspective and a willingness to adjust practices that better meet the needs of individual students.

The creative ideas from teachers led to challenges in designing a schedule that fully supports innovation. For example, a cross-disciplinary approach to English and Social Studies led to the intentional scheduling of sections of these two courses to facilitate collaborative work among teams of teachers. Other disciplines are desirous of similar opportunities but this has created a challenge for the scheduler to meet these requests while not putting too many constraints on the overall master schedule.

Teachers' efforts have been focused on meeting the individual needs of students as well as making the learning process more meaningful for students. As expressed by the principal:

"We are continuing to work out what good learning looks like in these kinds of environments and we hope not to merely present learning as something that needs to be 'done', but rather a process that affects who we are becoming as individual and a society."

It is apparent that this vision of making learning meaningful is bringing early results as there was an increase of 7 percentage points in intellectual engagement, as measured by the *Tell Them From Me* survey over the 2010/2011 school year.

M. E. LaZerte High School

<u>Jurisdiction:</u>	Edmonton School District
<u>Location:</u>	Edmonton
<u>Grades:</u>	10–12
<u>Population:</u>	1944

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

Prior to the introduction of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the principal of M. E. LaZerte implemented a comprehensive school-wide assessment plan that continued into the 2009/2010 transitional year. The school-wide assessment plan focuses on a wide variety of assessment for learning strategies to support student learning. A "Missed Assignment Make-Up Room" was established after school two days a week to provide students an opportunity to make up missing assignments. Also a "Step-Up" program was created so students are able to access self-directed learning opportunities. This school-wide assessment plan has had a strong influence on the High School Flexibility Project at the school. Conversations about potential strategies for alternative program delivery and organization were filtered through the lens of the assessment plan.

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year three areas were targeted to explore alternative organization and delivery. First, an Academic Support Center was implemented to assist struggling students to seek one-on-one support during class time. Next, students enrolled in the Math 14/24 program were given an opportunity to complete modules for this program in an individualized setting. The teacher working with this group provided clear time guidelines to help students pace their way through the program.

Finally, a combined Social 20-2/30-2 class was established in Semester II of the 2009/2010 school year. Students' timetables were adjusted to allow for this class to be delivered for the entire morning on alternating days. The teacher designed a variety of instructional approaches including a combination of direct instruction,

and videoconferencing. The teacher established high expectations for all students matched with considerable supports to help students achieve success.

At the conclusion of the transitional year there were significant gains in course completions overall in the school as well as observed gains in the success rate in both the Math 14/24 and Social 20-2/30-2 program.

As the 2009/2010 transitional year progressed, the administrative team worked with department heads to brainstorm other areas that alternative delivery may be strategically implemented. As a result of this the 2010/2011 school year will begin with additional strategies including:

- The "Step-Up" program is partnering with Alberta Distance Learning to continue to offer students more opportunities for self-directed learning.
- Combined CALM 20 and Physical Education classes where outcomes from both programs will be managed in one block of time.
- Combined 20/30 Academic Courses (English, Math, Biology, Chemistry and Physics) where students are registered in a 20/30 course sequence for the same discipline in two 80-minute periods blocked in their timetable one semester with the same teacher and curricular outcomes from the two courses are disaggregated and recombined to support student success at the 30 level.
- Intensive 30-level courses where students will have two 80-minute periods blocked in their timetable to manage either Math 30/31, English 30-2/English 30-1 or Physics 30/Chemistry 30 writing a diploma exam or final exam in November and one in January.
- Combined courses in Science 14/24 that is fast-tracked allowing students to complete both courses in half the time.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

School-wide assessment continues to be the overarching focus of the work of M.E. LaZerte professional staff over the 2010/2011 school year. Alternative scheduling practices brought about through initiatives spurred by the High School Flexibility Enhancement project continue and have created synergies for teachers in the implementation of their assessment for learning strategies.

Combined courses are one of the best examples that demonstrate synergies created by an alternative scheduling practice and the focus on school-wide assessment for learning strategies. Over the 2010/2011 school year combined courses were offered in the following areas:

English 30-2/30-1, Math 20/30 Pure, Math 20/30 Applied, Biology 20/30, Chemistry 20/30 and Physics 20/30. For these courses a group of students were scheduled with the same teacher for two 80 minute blocks per day in one semester effectively doubling the amount of time that a group of students worked with a single teacher. Not only did this scheduling arrangement allow the teacher to manage the curricular outcomes from two courses in meaningful ways, the increased amount of time spent as a learning community enhanced relationships contributing to a more supportive learning environment. As one teacher reported: *"I believe an interesting outcome of such a program is the camaraderie and cohesiveness that develops and the sense of being a part of something...when you spend so much time together, the relationships are strengthened tenfold."* Another teacher commented: *"The atmosphere in the class was the best I have ever experienced. Students got to know each other and the teacher. They seemed to genuinely care if their peers succeeded."* The enhanced

relationships contributed to meaningful assessment practice as feedback on learning was able to be more personal and based on a better understanding of the student and couched in a context of progressing as a collaborative learning community.

The notion of combining courses has enhanced the Knowledge and Employability program at the school as well. Outcomes of the Workplace Readiness Knowledge and Employability 10-4 course have been combined with the outcomes of English and Social Studies and taught by a single teacher over the year thus helping students make cross-curricular connections and experience connection between what they are learning and how that prepares them for the world of work.

Another approach to combination courses provided opportunities for students to complete more credits for coursework in a standard block of time. This opportunity was made available to students through a combined Science 14/24 as well as a CALM/Physical Education class both of which were offered in an 80 minute block over a semester. The Science 14/24 combination provided opportunities for students to personalize their pacing through the course outcomes. The CALM/Physical Education combination gave the teacher latitude to address program outcomes from two related areas in ways that were meaningful for a particular group of students. As one student expressed: *"We got to be physically active and learn skills for the real world all in one class."*

Also continuing from the 2009/2010 school year were the Step-Up Program and the Academic Support Center. The Step-Up Program allows students to pursue self-directed learning opportunities through Alberta Distance Learning. As an enhancement to this program starting in the 2011/2012 school year, students may use the Step-Up Program to review units of difficulty in Math 10-3 and Math 10C if they did not successfully complete outcomes from these courses in the first semester of study. Also, The Academic Support Center continued to operate allowing struggling students to get one-on-one help during class time.

Two new additions that are being planned for the 2011/2012 school year are the addition of a "Flex Block" for one hour per week where students throughout the school will be able to self-select tutorial opportunities to enhance their learning in scheduled courses. Also, a modified school calendar will be implemented in the 2011/2012 school year as a strategy to improve student engagement. Students will return to school in late August and will have a one-week November break in the fall.

In the words of the principal: *"It has been an interesting journey to be part of this project as it has allowed us to be more creative in our programming... There have been more conversations about engagement and determining how to assist students that were at risk of not passing a FLEX class. A common thread in the comments of students and staff is that both felt that there were stronger relationships between students and teachers as well as between peers."*

Olds High School

<u>Jurisdiction:</u>	Chinook's Edge School Division
<u>Location:</u>	Olds
<u>Grades:</u>	9–12
<u>Population:</u>	493

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

The Olds High School Community has been involved in extensive collaborative planning over the last several years to prepare for the opening of a new school (the Community Learning Campus (CLC)) that is built on the campus of Olds College. There has been a complete alignment of school district and school leadership in working with the broader community in Olds to create a new building and learning opportunity for high school students in Olds. The principal of the school has played a critical role over the last several years in bringing the community together and forging relationships with the college to present a new concept of high school to the students who moved into the new campus in December of the 2009/2010 school year. The High School Flexibility Project has provided the school community the flexibility it needed to take full advantage of the partnerships forged at the CLC.

The redesign of Olds High School is best described as a comprehensive, integrated set of strategies that is designed to evolve over the life of the project and beyond. Included in the redesign are elements of the following:

- Collaborative team planning and team teaching;
- Interdisciplinary project-based learning coupled with authentic assessment;
- Flexible use of time for both students and teachers;
- Dual credit opportunities through the partnership with the college;
- Flexible use of spaces both in the school building and designated areas of the college campus;
- A “school-within-a-school” structure breaking the community into smaller units with;
- A thematic approach to each year of high school to bring coherence to the student’s learning experience throughout their four years at the school;
- The development of personal learning plans for each individual student;
- A focus on student-centered decision-making.

The redesign of program delivery and organization drove the design of the new building. The building provides four distinct “pods” to house the four academies: one Grade 9 academy, two Grade 10–12 academies and one Grade 10–12 academy dedicate to self-paced, self directed learning. Each pod contains classroom spaces, large open areas for gathering and study, small meeting rooms and, a large flexible learning space. The timetable is designed to provide teacher teams with large “chunks” of time to manage the outcomes of the programs they are assigned to teach.

The Grade 9 academy is focused on students developing an understanding of their learning needs so that they can make an informed choice of either moving into the self-directed academy or the more “traditional” 10–12 academy for the remainder of their high school. A group of students is assigned a specific group of teachers

who will work with the students over the final three years at the school. It is the responsibility of the group of teachers to guide the students in the development of their personal learning plan and manage the learning in all of the curricular areas assigned to the academy. Students engage in learning “outside” of their academy for a group of programs such as physical education, physics and CTS. Students involved in the self-directed academy will progress at their own pace under the guidance of teachers assigned to that academy using a combination of teacher-designed resources, small group seminars, and tutorials.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The 2010/2011 school year marked the first full year that Olds High School operated at the Community Learning Campus (CLC). The culture at the school is evolving around the intentional design of the program and the environment that the new space creates. All elements of the initial design communicated in the Transitional Year Summary remain in place with one notable addition. Flex Time has been incorporated into the schedule for students. Flex Time allows students to direct their learning to areas of identified need for a period of time.

It is the cultural shift at the school which is most notable. A stated key objective of Olds High School in its work within the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project was to “create a philosophy of ‘where students come first’.” This student-centered approach to the work at the school coupled with the flexibility of the timetable and space has led to a culture of collaborative professionalism at the school as evidenced by the following:

- Regular cross-curricular meetings held among teachers to discuss pedagogy, plan community building activities and to set assessment consistencies;
- “Curriculum builds” where subject specific teachers gather to work on best practice, analyze data and do curriculum building work to transition through the years;
- A Professional Discussion Cohort (PDC) consisting of 15 teachers who meet voluntarily to discuss strategies to improve student engagement. This group is completely teacher-driven;

This school-wide focused approach to teacher collaboration for pedagogical improvement has led to a marked increase in team teaching behaviors and evidence of project-based approaches to subject discipline inquiry.

Program organization at Olds High School includes the “looping” of students from year-to-year. That is, groups of students study together over their high school years with an identified cluster of teachers. This approach allows the development of strong relationships between the students and teachers. The flexibility of the use of time and space coupled with the student-centered focus of the professional staff has led to marked changes in the behaviors of students as evidenced by the following:

- A marked increase in students using part of their school-time to pursue assistance from teachers;
- An increase in ad hoc study groups evident throughout the school;
- A marked decrease in classroom discipline issues;
- An increase in quality of project work;
- An increase in engagement in exam preparation opportunities.

The positive effects of professional collaborative focus come to light in the following comments by teachers at the school:

“Team teaching and collaboration have become part of our culture. From the sciences, the humanities, the arts, mathematics, and CALM, there are various levels of collaboration and team-teaching.”

"Looping with the classes has led to a noticeable improvement of rapport with students and comfort level. Trust of the learner to the teacher has grown since we have begun to transform our instructional practices."

A hallmark of the Community Learning Campus (CLC) is the partnership that exists between the Olds High School and Olds College along with other community agencies. This partnership has redefined the role of school leadership and has provided the students of Olds High School with many enhanced opportunities for learning in the community and post-secondary. As the CLC continues to evolve over the next school year, the school will focus its efforts on exploring further opportunities brought about by these community learning opportunities. It must be noted, however, that these opportunities are achievable in large part due to the flexibility afforded students in the use of time and space at Olds High School and the collaborative culture that is evolving at the school.

Peace Wapiti Academy

<u>Jurisdiction:</u>	Peace Wapiti School Division
<u>Location:</u>	Grande Prairie
<u>Grades:</u>	9–12
<u>Population:</u>	493

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

The bulk of the time over the 2009/2010 transitional year was used to engage students, parents and teachers in a dialogue around school redesign to determine the direction that the project should take over the following three years. A combination of surveys, focus groups, forums, and, planning and information meetings took place over the year to gain the input of all stakeholders and to begin an ongoing conversation about school improvement. As the year progressed, input coalesced into two major themes: the school needed to create structures to better support learning relationships and use of time needed to be conceived in a manner that meaningfully responded to the individual needs of students. These themes led to two key strategies for the school. The institution of a new role for teachers called "Academic and Individual Mentor (AIM)". The AIM role defined a set of actions and responsibilities that each teacher in the school would adopt to act as a student advocate and a monitor of student learning progress. The second strategy was a decision to alter the bell schedule to include a flexible block of time (called iPlan) to "allow students choice in how to meet their educational needs".

Over the transitional year a planning team was put into place whose job it was to work out the details of how the two key strategies would be implemented in the 2010/2011 school year. Part of this planning included the development of materials for teachers to use. As well the team experimented with alternative bell schedules in the second half of the transitional year to determine how best to incorporate iPlan time into the timetable.

In addition to the two key strategies are a number of supportive strategies that will provide students with additional flexibility for their learning. Included in these are:

- The establishment of flexible testing dates for students accompanied by a central testing center for students to be assessed;
- The implementation of an integrated CALM course for Grade 10 students where CALM outcomes are addressed in a number of other course areas (Math, English, Social and PE);
- The opportunity for students to engage in self-directed CTS courses (outside of scheduled CTS courses);
- Access to on-line coursework as an alternative method of delivery within regularly scheduled class;
- The implementation of “Academic Recovery” time for students who did not complete course outcomes in the timeframe of scheduled courses;
- Use of MOODLE to support the fast-tracking of students in the Math 24 and Science 14/24 program.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

Following from the experiences at Peace Wapiti Academy over the transitional year, the two key strategies of “Academic and Individual Mentor (AIM)” and the flexible student-directed block called “iPlan” have continued into the first year of the pilot phase of the project. A third key strategy has been added called CONNECT. The CONNECT Program is designed to extend learning opportunities for students who have not met success in course outcomes at the conclusion of a term of study. The school plans to extend the CONNECT Program to include opportunities for students to accelerate their pace in courses of study thus completing all possibilities of pacing available to students at the school.

AIM, iPlan and CONNECT work as an integrated set of strategies that fulfill the intent of the project to meaningfully respond to the wide variety of learning needs and to enhance relationships at the school. Specifically, iPlan and CONNECT provide students with opportunities to progress in school at a pace that best reflects their individual pace of learning. In addition, iPlan allows students to develop valuable experiences in self-direction. AIM provides students with a teacher-advocate that is able to provide the guidance and advice to enable students to make good decisions to support their learning.

The school’s decisions to provide students with learning opportunities that reflect their pace of learning has led to some very positive early results. Students who were involved in the CONNECT program demonstrate significantly higher levels of interest and motivation as well as levels of valuing school outcomes as measured by the *Tell Them From Me* survey. As one student expressed: *“I was a lot more comfortable with the teacher and built more of a relationship since you’re always just with them while learning the topics.”*

These three integrated strategies have led to a shift in the culture at the school. Professional staff is more focused on meeting the individual needs of students rather than planning programs that “aim for the middle”. Assessment of student learning is more focused on mastery of outcomes rather than measuring content acquisition. This is evidenced by the growing trend in “no-zero” approaches to assignment completion, the development of a range of testing opportunities through the use of a central testing center and the acceptance of students re-doing work and reassessing outcomes. CONNECT has also become a catalyst for innovations leading to staff exploration of new ways of teaching including: team-teaching; use of technology to support learning; outcomes-based assessment; and continuous reporting of progress to parents.

This shift in the professional culture of the school has led to shifts in the expectations and responses of students as shown in the following statements from teachers at the school:

"Students are expected to become more independent and take learning into their own hands."

"I found that I had to step back even more so the students could make the mistakes and ask their classmates for clarification. It was great to see students helping each other and this also gave me more time to help struggling students..."

This shift in professional culture has also led to the realization of a changing role for teachers:

"I am learning to teach in a totally new way – not easy after so many years of doing it a different way. This means LOTS of extra time studying, learning and preparing classes..."

"Managing students who are each proceeding at a different pace requires great organizational skills and dealing with students on a more individual basis requires a deeper understanding of the different methods by which students learn."

Spruce Grove Composite High School

Jurisdiction: Parkland School Division

Location: Spruce Grove

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1026

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

The principal has utilized a distributed leadership model for planning and decision-making throughout all phases of the project at the school. In the transitional year, a large planning committee of representatives from each curricular area along with the entire administrative team has worked with all stakeholder groups in their school community to guide the direction of the project. Input from parents, teacher and students has been sought and discussed by the planning committee which has the responsibility of transforming this input into a vision for the project. This overarching vision has been given back to each department within the school to develop strategies that will help move their specific department and the school forward in reaching the overarching vision for the school.

Highlights of the vision for the school over the life of the project are:

- Departments offer multiple tracks for learning to occur at any pace.
- The school provides a variety of common work areas for students.
- Multiple teachers teaching multiple units to a variety of students (teachers teaching ALL students).
- Students display competencies and attain mastery at a pace commensurate with their needs and abilities.
- Increase student one-on-one consultation.
- Students take ownership for their education through personalized learning opportunities for students to learn any time/any place/any pace.

- Professional Learning time built into teachers' timetable for collaboration.
- Independent study resource room housed with core teachers throughout the day for students to access help as needed.

Throughout the transitional year, Student-Teacher Advisory Teams (STAT) were established for Grade 10 students. The purpose of STAT was to provide Grade 10 students with a key adult in the school who would provide guidance and establish a critical learning relationship at the school. Over the transitional year a committee was struck to develop a STAT handbook for teacher use. A second major initiative was the establishment of "Flexible Wednesdays". On one Wednesday a month the school was organized to support students in a self-directed approach to their learning. Several formats were explored throughout the transitional year to provide numerous opportunities for students to choose from in order to enrich or remediate their learning at the school. Through the exploration of several approaches different tracking systems were experimented with to keep students accountable for the time that they had available to them on Flexible Wednesdays.

As the school is moving into the pilot project phase, STAT is being expanded to all grade levels and "Flexible Wednesdays" have evolved into daily opportunities for students to have access to "personalized learning time" when they have demonstrated a commitment to mastering course outcomes. Wednesday's timetable will be altered to allow for a large block of time for teachers to meet as groups and for students to have access to remediation and/or enrichment.

Individual departments are expected to continue to implement strategies that support the overall vision of the school. The planning committee will continue to assemble these strategies and share with the broader school community as well as continue to engage with all students, parents and teachers to contribute to the direction that the school takes over the life of the project.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

Emerging from the experiences over the 2009/2010 transitional year and input from staff and students over the year, Spruce Grove Composite administration opened the 2010/2011 school year with a major revision to the bell schedule. Features of the revised use of time include:

- Daily opportunities for students to access support to their class-based work through seminars. Core subject area teachers are able to use these scheduled seminar times to capture groups of students where needed.
- A weekly Student Teacher Advisory Team (STAT) meeting for 30 minutes each Wednesday. STAT is extended to all teachers and students throughout the school.
- A weekly opportunity for students to pursue "*Personalized Learning Time*" for over 140 minutes each Wednesday. This time is set aside for students to direct their learning and support in areas of need and interest guided by the Teacher Advisor in STAT.
- Weekly scheduled times for subject area departments to meet during the school day on Wednesdays for collaborative planning.

These alterations to the bell schedule were instituted to address the following areas of the vision of redesign at the school:

- Providing opportunities for teachers to build meaningful relationships with students and to help guide student choices when self-directed time is made available to students;
- Delineating in the schedule time for teachers to engage in direct instruction versus time when they are available to students for assistance and enrichment;
- Imbedding collaborative professional practice into the routines of the school;
- Encouraging collaborative practice and team-teaching arrangements among teachers;
- Providing meaningful opportunities for students to personalize their learning to honour their individual pacing and interests.

An excellent example of the above vision in practice was the Grade 10 cohort that was assembled to provide instruction in the areas of Physical Education, CALM and Information Processing. All Grade 10 students were scheduled into a block for the entire year working with three teachers who were responsible for managing student progress through these three areas of study. Students were given a wide variety of choices of how to meet the outcomes of Physical Education through various activities. Then opportunities to meet the outcomes from CALM and Information Processing were built around the personal Physical Education choices made by students. The end result was a more personalized program for Physical Education and, as a result, a flexible delivery approach for study in the other two courses. The school learned much about the advantages of a collaborative approach to managing outcomes and providing flexibility for students through this Grade 10 cohort approach.

Although the school has made significant shifts in the way that time is used, the focus for the school evolved into a collective dialogue among all members about the nature of learning. As the year progressed issues arose among professional staff around developing a consistent vision for teaching and learning. Assessment practices, collaborative teaching, project-based inquiry approaches and the balance between self-direction and teacher-direction became persistent topics of conversation. As minds turned to these general issues of pedagogy and beliefs about learning the community has seen a need to engage in significant conversations and recommitment to the chosen vision.

St. Mary of the Lake/St. Francis of Assisi

<u>Jurisdiction:</u>	Living Waters Catholic Separate Regional Division
<u>Location:</u>	Slave Lake
<u>Grades:</u>	K–12
<u>Population:</u>	184 (Total); 35 (10–12)

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

There has been a focus on school improvement at St. Mary of the Lake School over the five years preceding the transitional year of the High School Flexibility Enhancement project. Using surveys and focus groups, the principal has engaged students, parents and teachers at the school to determine what works and what doesn't work for learning. The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project has given the school the opportunity to redesign its program delivery and school organization to meaningfully respond to this input.

The work over the transitional year at the school has been comprehensive and far-reaching. Included in the strategies over the 2009/2010 year are: integrating course outcomes, team teaching, flexible scheduling to meet student needs, and a variety of assessment strategies for students to demonstrate competencies. The overall goal of the improvement efforts is to “personalize the educational experiences of our high school students and create a transformational change in our school”.

The teaching staff has been reorganized into interdisciplinary teams which are responsible for managing, as a collaborative team, outcomes from connected programs of study (for example, Social Studies/Language Arts). Each team of teachers is given a large chunk of time in the daily schedule to meet with students as they interact with projects that address the connected disciplines. The amount of time that a particular project is given is left to the discretion of the interdisciplinary team. In addition, the interdisciplinary team is encouraged to seek out additional connections to other program areas (such as CTS) in developing their projects. Assessments are “blended” in a manner that a single assessment will be used to give evidence of learning in specific outcomes from several different areas. It has been discovered that this approach is ultimately a more efficient use of available learning time. The “time saved” in this approach is used to “get into high-order thinking activities, to deepen students’ knowledge, expand their skills, and to ensure learning activities are practical...and preparing students for life”.

Results from the first year of this redesign effort are promising with evidence of increased attendance by students as well as increased engagement in learning activities. Although the work has been, at times, frantic and there have been many stops and starts in this transitional year, there has been a palpable enthusiasm from students, parents and teachers alike. As two teachers reported:

- I believe in this project because it is what real learning and teaching is supposed to be about. This is forcing me to look at the curriculum in a new perspective and truly evaluate what is important for students to know.
- How often in a career comes a chance to really create something new and perhaps make something for others to follow? This project is an opportunity to create an educational system the way I think it should be – I would choose the hard work and stress over an easy assignment.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The work at St. Mary of the Lake School continues to follow the path that was set in the 2009/2010 Transitional year. The central focus of structural change continues to be the development of team-teaching approaches to address interdisciplinary coursework.

In addition, the professional staff continues to work collaboratively to refine practices and processes in the following areas:

- Creating real-life, hands-on opportunities for students to add relevance to their learning;
- Exploring community partnerships to offer courses and provide additional learning opportunities;
- Using a “Backwards-By-Design” approach to the planning of collaborative instructional units;
- Expanding course offerings and alternative pacing opportunities in order to better personalize learning for students;
- Revisiting and recreating the school grading policy including:
 - A no zero policy

- Using only recent assessment data for grades
- Allowing re-assessment
- Reworking final examination practices
- A re-thinking of assessment practices to ensure that they do not conflict with overall school goals in planning and instruction;
- Instituting student portfolios and Personal Education Plans to enhance student ownership in learning;
- Developing student-led conferences to replace traditional parent-teacher interviews;
- Implementing skill-based groupings of students that are flexible based on progress of student learning;
- Establishing a more continuous learning approach that allows students to carry-over courses from semester-to-semester or year-to-year.

These efforts have garnered the following results:

- Students are experiencing more success in coursework as they have more choices and can approach their learning in a more personalized fashion;
- Teachers are less reliant on textbooks and are using various sources of information to construct learning activities;
- Professional staff are engaged in deeper questioning about practice and are open to exploring more options to meet student need;
- Increased parent, student and staff satisfaction in the work of the school;

The changes that have been made at the school are many and varied and have evolved quickly. It is clear that the collaborative work has changed the culture of the school. In the words of the principal:

"We have had favorable responses from staff, students and parents about the changes we have made. People seem happier and more satisfied. We have seen more students earn more credits. There are also more courses available for students to choose from. Studying literature, beginning new practices, and making changes has re-invigorated the school and made us more contemporary. Staff are working together and are learning from each other and are excited about what they are doing. The school has a strong and clear focus. There is confidence in our collective ability to handle whatever needs to be done to make students successful."

Wm. E. Hay Composite

Jurisdiction: Clearview School Division
Location: Stettler
Grades: 9–12
Population: 425

2009/2010 Transitional Year Summary

Over the planning period for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the administrative team at Wm. E. Hay Composite engaged in a thorough examination of their program from the perspective of each stakeholder group in their community. Through a combination of surveys, information sessions and focus groups with students, teachers and parents, a large amount of information was compiled and analyzed leading to the focus of the work at the school over the 2009/2010 transitional year. The school has also been

undergoing a major modernization that created significant disruption to the daily operations of the school. However, the focus of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project and the simultaneous modernization has provided both a figurative and practical experience with “redesigning” the school.

Following from the input received from the school community, the principal assembled a core planning team that has built a vision for the work of the school through the transitional year and beyond. There are two keys to the vision for the redesign at Wm. E. Hay Composite. The first is a commitment to building strong relationships to support learning. The second is a realization that the industrial “lock-step” approach to program delivery does not provide the flexibility to both students and staff to meet the individual needs of students. In order to move towards this vision a large number of initiatives were implemented in the transitional year including:

- Redesigning an existing teacher advisory program to focus building relationships and not delivering curriculum;
- Piloting student led conferences;
- Instituting a “flex block” into the weekly timetable to allow students to direct their learning to meet their individual needs;
- Implementing “restorative courses” which provides additional time and support to students who may have not yet met the requirements of a course to receive credit;
- The design of self-directed learning modules into existing course structures to expose students to the opportunity to explore their learning in a more personalized fashion;
- The establishment of a collaborative “Student Resource Team” that works in harmony with the teacher advisory of students who are struggling;
- Implementing a variety of courses that are available to students outside of the traditional school day.

The initiatives introduced in the transitional year have been challenging to the school community but have been successful in moving towards the vision for redesign. As the transitional year ended the initiatives implemented are continuing forward – many are being expanded due to the creativity and commitment of the teaching staff as they embrace the vision of redesign.

In the words of the principal:

The extent of change occurring at Wm. E. Hay in the past year has been staggering, however, the change has encouraged teachers to continue to “think outside the box” and continually reflect on how to improve the educational experience for our students. It is difficult to focus exclusively on one aspect of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project at Wm. E. Hay – the myriad of redesign efforts are so closely intertwined. We are confident that through the wealth of initiatives put into place in the implementation year all of the targets outlined in the Evaluation Plan for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project will be addressed.

2010/2011 Pilot Year 1 Summary

The broad-reaching, integrated strategies piloted in the transitional year were carried forth into the first year of implementation. The major shift that has occurred at the school is the level of “buy-in” of staff due to practical experiences gained with piloted strategies at the school over the transitional year coupled with a focused and intentional professional development plan that included visitations to schools and jurisdictions throughout North America that are engaged in high school redesign. The end result has been a deeply committed and

enthusiastic professional learning community that has a clear sense of vision and direction in creating a personalizing learning environment at Wm. E. Hay Composite.

One major change was made to the school master timetable in the 2010/2011 school year. Period lengths were created of varying lengths and specific courses were intentionally scheduled into periods based on the need for time. For example, input from students and teachers indicated that more time was needed to master outcomes of mathematics but less time was needed to deal with courses such as Career and Life Management. However, it is important to note that the approach of the school and its teachers is that scheduled class time is merely a starting point for meeting student needs. Strategies (such as the flex block and restorative courses) have been integrated into the practice to recognize that any schedule, no matter how flexible it might be, still needs to be adjusted to meet the needs of individual students.

The key structural features of the redesign efforts have not changed from the transitional year: teacher advisory, restorative courses, availability of student-directed time, and, opportunities for learning outside of school. However, there have been notable enhancements to these key structural features that have been brought about by the creative and thoughtful efforts of professional staff. These enhancements are outlined below:

- Students are assigned to teacher advisory groups using a process that matches the interest of the student with the teacher advisory (rather than a process of random assignment);
- Student Learning Conferences, conferences with the teacher advisor, parent, and student, are held school-wide based on a successful pilot of the concept the previous year;
- Restorative courses have been expanded to include a larger number of “restorative coaches” and the process has been enhanced to include the development of a Personal Education Plan through the collaborative input from the teacher, parent and student;
- A “Math Enhancement” class was instituted to provide additional time for students to access one-to-one support with a teacher in a multi-graded environment;
- Several teachers are offering self-directed learning units as an option for students to engage with material in their scheduled classes;
- A Student Resource Team has been instituted that focuses on creating modified programming and increasing student supports for students who have attendance issues;
- “Extended Learning Opportunities” have been made available through an identified coordinator that works with students to devise a student-directed Personal Education Plan to engage in a learning activity, usually connected with a career interest, outside of the school.

As the school moves into the second year of implementation staff have rallied behind a focus to explore and implement a plan of competency based assessment. The focus on personalization at the school has naturally led the professional staff to reflect on their assessment practices and engage in an action-oriented inquiry to redesign assessment. As the principal states: *“While assessment is not necessarily linked to time or the absence of the Carnegie Unit, what is interesting is that the removal of the time restrictions facilitated implementation of best practice in all realms of education.”*